

**The Wisdom of Christ**  
**The Cost of Following Christ**  
**Bible Study 3 - Luke 9:57-62**

**Goals:**

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

**Expectations:**

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

**Note:**

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

**Suggested Homework:**

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 9:57-62 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

**Introduction:**

**MIXER:** Please share a specific time you particularly sensed God's presence in your life. (we know that God is always with us; share a time when you were especially aware of that fact)

**DISCUSS:** Share another time when you had to pay a price for something you believed in. Was it worth it? Why would you say it was or wasn't?



## Literary Background

Format of the text: (summary view)

- A Follow (57a)  
Go (57b)  
Cost (too high?- parable) (58)
- B Follow (59a)  
Go (59b)  
Cost (59c)  
Cost (60a)  
Go (60b)  
Follow- "Proclaim the Kingdom"(60c)
- A' Follow (61a)  
Go (61b)  
Cost (62)

Format of the text: full view of Luke 9:57-62

- And as they were going along the road
- A A man said to him,  
"I will *follow* you  
Wherever you *go*."  
And Jesus said to him,  
"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have roosts.  
But the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."
- B To another he said  
"*Follow* me."  
But he said, "Lord, let me *go* first  
*To bury* my father."  
  
But he said to him,  
Leave the dead to *bury* their own dead.  
But you *go*  
And *proclaim* the kingdom of God."
- A' And another said,  
"I will *follow* you, Lord,  
But first let me (*go* and) take leave of those at my home."  
And Jesus said,  
"No one who puts his hand to the plow  
And looks back  
Is of any use in the kingdom of God."

There are several literary features in this rich text. As I've highlighted with the formatting above, there are several chiasms here in the text. The step parallelisms in A and A' are both helpful in seeing the connection between those thoughts. In addition, there is an additional section placed between the two elements of the step parallelism. This forms an inverted parallelism, accentuating the middle discourse in this chain. The middle term itself is also an inverted parallelism, further strengthening this

idea of its importance. Remember, each of these literary features is designed for the author to show us how we ought to connect the ideas and prioritize their meanings (i.e., which is the central theme, what ideas support it, etc.)

Included below are the descriptions and examples from the first Bible Study. If you don't remember all the details, please read the next two sections in their entirety. If you remember clearly the purpose and central idea of Step and Inverted Parallelisms, please read the **bolded** text and the examples. If you are struggling with these literary forms still, please ask your leader to help you.

### Step parallelism

The step parallelism is designed to show relation similarly to the standard parallelism. Usually, there are repeated words, and the same progression of thought. It draws our focus to see how the two phrases or sets are different and similar. In summary, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

#### My silly example:

- A     The one *drinking Coke* will be *happy*,  
B         and he will also be *full of joy*.
- A'     I *drink Coke* and feel *happy* inside,  
B'         and within my heart my *joy* is *full*.

Here, we see common words used and a similar progression. The author then may be seeking to draw attention to this particular progression. In addition, the change from speaking about anyone who drinks Coke to personal experience further shows another facet to the truth of the material. Remember, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

### Inverted Parallelism

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

#### My silly example of an inverted parallelism

- A     I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*  
B         Their *chocolate chips* are delicious  
C             My tummy is filled with *warmth* when  
D             I think of my mom and the times she made them for me  
C'         I am *warmed* by the memories as  
B'         The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth  
A'         and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

**Cultural background: (Make sure you have read the parable before doing this section)**

**--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.**

**Foxes and Birds: (v.58)**

In many parables there is a possibility for the author to communicate a play on words or a double entendre, and these discourses present a likely opportunity. It would be similar to an inside joke, or a comment made to a friend that reminded them of a situation in the past they shared. In either case, the hearer interprets not only what was said, but also remembers the context and previous experience he or she had with that particular joke or phrase and it may also be funny, cutting or serious. Similarly, our text may contain several references to secondary meanings based on the culture and experiences of the hearers, but we will get to those references later. **Jesus' primary emphasis in this first discourse is to question whether the listener would follow a rejected Messiah.**

It is important to note that the translation of "roosts" is preferable to "nests" because the emphasis is on the resting/safe place of those animals. A nest is a temporary home created for the young until they reach maturation. Once they are gone or danger comes, the nest is abandoned. But it is the roost that is secure and which provides protection and rest to the bird.

The possible double entendre I referred to before is bound up in the political scene of the time. Even today, religion and politics are intrinsically tied together in the mind of the Middle Easterner and would be constantly dealt with, especially among rabbis and other such influential religious leaders within the community. Throughout the gospels, Jesus deals commonly with the Jewish nationalists who attempt to justify their rebellion and incite him to validate and join their cause. It is likely that this is what Jesus was communicating, adding that second layer of meaning to our understanding.

The "birds of the air" was an apocalyptic symbol of gentile nations during the intertestamental period and Jesus may be picking up on this cultural reference. The "fox" is a term Jesus connected with Herod, or Roman authority (c.f. Luke 13:32). An oppressed people does not speak openly of rebellion or resistance, especially during a time when those who opposed Rome openly met crucifixion or the sword, so instead, they must communicate with symbols and metaphors. It is likely that Jesus has this additional layer in mind when answering this man. Jesus' point, in essence, may sound like this: if you want power and influence, go to the "birds" (the powerful gentile nations) who "feather their nests" everywhere. Follow the "fox" (Rome) who manages his own affairs with considerable cunning. For, in spite of your expectations, the Son of Man stands powerless and alone. **Are you serious in wanting to follow a rejected Son of Man?**

**QUESTION:** Regardless of the validity of the secondary cultural meaning, what is the main point Jesus is making in this first discourse? Why do you think so?

### **Burying your Father: (v.59)**

In the second discourse, a very odd exchange seems to happen between Jesus and this would-be follower. The contemporary American reading this passage is drawn to an interpretation which, ungrounded in the cultural setting, may produce some interesting theology about following Christ. The man on the road is commanded to follow, but responds with a seemingly legitimate excuse, the death of his father. However, the cultural scene must be set before we make any conclusions about Christ's response.

In the Middle East, even today, "bury your father" is a common euphemism for the concept of taking care of your father until he has passed. Commonly, the Middle Easterner sees his primary responsibility once he has become a man to take care of his parents until they die. Then, he is loosed from his responsibility. Often in Middle Eastern homes, it is thought a terrible insult for a man to leave his home and settle elsewhere before he has fulfilled his societal obligation to his parents. This especially comes up when describing emigration today. For example, it would be culturally unacceptable to pick up your things and move to America if your father was living. Many men wait until their father has passed and then move their family to where they desire to live.

A question which should be asked is, if his father had just died and they were planning to bury him that day (Mediterranean climate is not ideal for body preservation), why is this man on the road talking to Jesus and not mourning or taking care of the body and his mother and siblings? As seen in the account of Jairus' daughter's death and of Lazarus' death, a funeral was a very important community event. In Middle Eastern culture, if you had lost a loved one, you remained in your house and wept, and all in the community would come and comfort you. Were this man's father dead, he would have been in his home. **What this man is asking could be summed up thusly: I will follow you; but first, let me fulfill my duty to stay with my father until he dies. Let me fulfill my obligations first.**

**QUESTION:** What is the significance of this discourse appearing in the center of this parable? What does that communicate about the main idea of the parable?

**QUESTION:** What kind of commitment is Jesus asking for?

### **Saying Goodbye: (v.61)**

Once again, a man comes to Christ and expresses his desire to follow. Like the others, he offers an excuse which seems plausible, but when placed under the scrutiny of the culture of the day, his intent is more obvious. As already mentioned, the tie one carried to their family and parents was extremely strong. In all things, the children were expected to respect and honor their parents, and any action which might disgrace or shame the family was avoided at all costs. In Palestine, fathers frequently beat children, even adults, who publically shamed the family or their father. It was expected that when a child stepped out of line, they would be corrected.

Here, the man asks if he may tell his family goodbye; however, a better rendering is to "take leave of." What this man is asking Jesus is, "Let me ask my family if it's alright if I follow you. Once they have given their approval and blessing, then I will follow." Naturally, the father will not allow the son to take leave and pursue some fool's errand. Anyone reading the account in the Middle East would realize this young man lacks the commitment of following, so he instead uses his family ties as an excuse. Jesus' response is also very telling. For if this young man was genuinely committed to following Christ without regard to what the fallout in his family might be, Jesus would have commended him. However, he is condemned.

One must remember the family atmosphere of the culture. For in the Mid-East, every day, upon rising, the man goes to his father or mother after praying to receive their blessing. If he decides to start a business, he first asks his parent's permission. When he is to be married, he approaches his parents with a request of marriage, and they decide whether or not he is ready and to whom he ought to be married. In this culture it would have been seen as the "right thing" to request his father's permission, even though the father more than likely would have refused. Jesus teaching would have been both shocking and disturbing to anyone on the scene. The radical nature of this teaching would leave the hearers in one of two ways: acceptance/compliance or rejection/hostility. In the Middle East, there is not greater authority than the family and the father, yet **Jesus esteems his call above even the most important call of the day.**

**QUESTION:** What excuses does Jesus reject in this section?

**QUESTION:** What might it sound like for someone to use this excuse today?

### **Hand to the Plow: (v.62)**

When interpreting Jesus statement about plowing, it is helpful to remember the background of the time and place. Plowing was a very precise and very daunting activity which required a sure hand and constant attention. The light plow is guided by one hand. This one hand, generally the left, must at the same time keep the plough upright, regulate its depth by pressure, and lift it over the rocks and stones in its path. The plowman uses the other hand to drive the unruly oxen with a goad about two yards long, fitted with an iron spike. At the same time he must continually look between the hindquarters of the oxen, keeping the furrow in sight. This primitive type of plow needs dexterity and concentrated attention. If the plowman looks around, the new furrow becomes crooked. **Thus, whoever wishes to follow Jesus must be resolved to break every link with the past, and fix his eye only on the coming Kingdom of God.**

### **Conclusion:**

It is of note as we finish the study that we are not given the responses of each man that Jesus addressed. In this, the reader is expected to supply the response. The text not only makes many statements about what it is to follow Christ, but Luke asks the reader to make a decision. So what will it be? Will you count the cost and follow Christ, or will you make excuses?

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) **DISCUSS:** As you read through the parable, how would you sum up the meaning into one sentence? (hint, look to the center of the chiasm- part "B") How does this fit into Luke's purpose that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save the world?
- 2) **DISCUSS:** Please describe one clarification of the cultural or literary features which impacted you and helped you understand the parable better.

- 3) **DISCUSS:** What is hard about the type of call Jesus is using? What do you think it would take for your life to show this kind of dedication?
  
- 4) **DISCUSS:** How do you feel the weight of Christ's call on your life?
  
- 5) **DISCUSS:** How can you live with a more real sense of the cost Jesus is calling you to? Read Hebrews 12:1-2. What sin or weight might you need to sacrifice that you've been holding on to? How does this text speak to the truth that Jesus articulates here?
  
- 6) **DISCUSS:** Please write one way you can live with cost in mind this week.

**ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)**

- 1) This parable is all about the cost of following Christ. Luke is expressing that to follow Jesus is the only way, yet it is costly. It costs Christ everything to save us, and it costs us everything to follow.
- 2) Answers will vary.
- 3) Jesus explains that the cost is often the things you hold dearest (power, family, acceptance). Answers will vary.
- 4) Answers will vary.
- 5) Answers will vary-Leaders, try to describe what it means to count your life as loss and to follow Christ with your whole heart. Sin and Weight are two different things here. Sin is sin and sometimes we play with it instead of cutting it off. Occasionally there are also weights and encumber our progress spiritually that, although not sin, hamper our relationship with God. Try to draw the connection between sin and weights that must be given up and Jesus call to sacrifice and follow.
- 6) Answers will vary.