
“Walking By Faith” Lenten Series
“Walking By Faith: Follow The Leader”

First Sermon In The Series

Luke 9:23-25

“23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

Luke 9:23-25 (NIV)

Children’s Sermon: “Follow The Leader”

Let’s play a game. This is one of my favorites! Do you know why it’s my favorite? Because it’s easy. It’s called, “Follow the Leader.” Let’s play. Just follow me. (Have children imitate several actions as in “Simon Says.”).

Was that fun? Yes, it was fun. Why? Because it’s easy to follow me.

What’s the most important part of this game? It’s taking the first step. Why? Because if we don’t take the first step, we can’t play.

Is it easy to follow Jesus? No, it isn’t. But it’s even harder to take the first step. But even when we fail, Jesus forgives us. And do you know why He forgives us? Yes, first He does it because He loves us. Second, He does it so that we can keep on following Him.

So, now that we know Jesus is the leader, what should we do? Right! Take the first step and follow Him!

Sermon:

Leadership. Everything rises and falls on it in our lives, doesn’t it. When individuals are decisive and able to make the necessary hard choices, we call them leaders. They are people we want to be with. They are people we respect. They are people we want to follow.

Walking by Faith, the congregational process in which we are currently participating, involves many things. Faith, of course, involves knowledge of Jesus Christ, a passion to love Him, and a desire to follow Him. After all, Jesus is our leader.

Since Jesus is our leader, perhaps it is helpful for us to consider our faith by asking the question, “*What does it mean to be a leader?*” Once we know what a leader is, and what a leader does, then we will gain valuable insight into Jesus, our greatest Leader of leaders. And, when we find out what a remarkable Leader He is, we will then be better equipped to “follow the leader.”

President Dwight Eisenhower once said,

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

I like that. Because it demonstrates one of the key tasks of leadership—to bring others to the same enduring passion as the leader.

That’s why Jesus was such a leader. Because He had a passion...a passion so broad, so deep, so amazing, so compelling that there was nothing—nothing—that would keep Him from realizing His passion. Not only did He dedicate His life to it; but He gave up everything, including His life, to realize His passion.

What was His passion? All we need to do to discover what that passion was is to see Jesus on the cross. His passion was simply to love us...with everything, I mean EVERYTHING, He had.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text, He not only *knew* His passion. He also knew the *depth* of his conviction. That’s why He said,

“23 Then He said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Luke 9:23-25 (NIV)

Notice how Jesus, as leader par excellence, lays it all on the line. He tells us that we have a choice.

- 1) We can try to avoid pain and risk (that is, “save one’s life”) and lose out on the joy He has planned for us...or
- 2) We can decide to finally move forward, following Jesus, no matter what the cost.

Whether we’re talking about matters of faith or life, the issue is the same: Do you just want to live, breathe and die...or do you really want to really, really live exuberantly...with great joy?

This choice is not without consequences. That’s why Jesus said,

“What good is it, for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

If you think you’re going to have joy and happiness by gaining everything in the world, Jesus would tell us, “think again!” The real joy comes by following our sanctified, faith-driven heart. When we discover God’s will, seek God’s will, and follow Jesus’ will for us—regardless of the cost—we’re on the way to joy, REAL joy!

With these words, it’s almost as if Jesus is saying,

“Take a look at your life. Take a hard look. Now, make a decision. Do you want to lose your very self...or do you want to have a soul filled with joy?”

Last week many of us watched the Superbowl. No doubt, as the world was watching the half-time show on TV, some very hard words were spoken in the locker-room. I’m sure each coach said something to the effect,

“What do you want to do? Do you want to win...or just show up? Do you want to be proud and hold your head up high for the rest of your life...or do you just want to keep on going in the same way you have been?”

The coach told the teams if they want the joy, they’re going to have to have such a passion to win that they’ll be willing to give up everything to attain their goal.

And that’s where “*Walking by Faith*” begins. Why? Because it’s hard to give up everything...and just trust God.

In Lesson Two of her workbook, “*Walking By Faith*,” Jennifer Rothschild said,
“When we depend on God for everything, “we risk something that we *can’t* lose.”

That’s what Jesus means. If you want to find your soul, discover an amazing life and experience unprecedented joy, *risk it all*. That’s right. Risk it all and place yourself into God’s hands...completely. Yes, give it all up. At first sight, it seems like quite a risk. But Jennifer Rothschild and Jesus both know the same thing. When we place ourselves into God’s hands, we just can’t lose.”

That’s the critical issue which will determine if we will follow Jesus, isn’t it? Can you place yourself into God’s hands? If you’re not sure, here’s three simple steps.

- 1) First, decide to follow Jesus.
- 2) Second, decide to take the first step.
- 3) Third, and most important, take the first step.

Leadership guru Charles S. Lauer once said,

“Leaders don’t force people to follow—they invite them on a journey.”

This Lent, Jesus is inviting *you* on a journey...a journey of faith. It’s a journey which begins with our Baptism. It’s a journey that ultimately leads to the cross of Christ and His empty tomb. But whether the journey will be one of agony and disappointment or one of joy is up to us, isn’t it!

A little boy prayed to God.

“Dear God: I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I’m having a hard time loving all of them.”

God doesn’t have trouble loving you. We are confident in that. Today, this Lent, God calls us to take that confidence to another level. Take the next step of discipleship. Follow Him. Trust Him. And go for the joy.

May God enable you to walk by faith, not sight, and determine now to follow Him where He leads you. Amen.

Thomas F. Fischer