

These verses in Luke are some of those controversial passages that I think when preachers see it, they want to run screaming the other way. However, these verses in Luke, when translated from the Greek meant something different than how we see the words today. In the New International Version or NRSV, the word used is the word “hate” instead of letting go. The translation of The Message actually has it closer to the original meaning. I mean if you actually literally believe that Jesus wanted us to hate our family and ourselves, it’s no wonder it’s controversial, because it’s contradicting a message of God’s love. But this is not the meaning intended if you follow the scholarly translation that was meant, which is more like, let go of your own grip on anything that would take priority over assisting Jesus in bringing Kingdom of God to earthly practice, whether it be family obligations, your own plans, or commitment without forethought.

So let’s unpack the different scenarios this scripture could drum up using the original intended meaning. Jesus is walking to his death basically, to Jerusalem, and he’s followed by a large number of people. I wonder if he’s a bit annoyed at that, at their hanging on to him because maybe it’s just about what they can get from him, or it’s about the momentary joy that comes from clinging to a celebrity. I wonder if Jesus wanted to put reality into their minds where it wasn’t before. Look here people, if you want to keep literally following me around, take heed at the consequences of that choice, be wise and have forethought about continuing to follow me around, because it won’t always be pretty.

He may be telling them that you can’t have one foot forward towards discipleship and one foot in one’s other life. Following Jesus means both feet forward. His two analogies about building the tower and going to war are interesting descriptors about what it means to plunge into something without thinking about what you’re really getting into. When he talks about how other

people will treat those who don't follow through on the commitment, he's referring to the honor/shame culture that Jesus knew. Anything done is done with the public viewpoint in mind. Anything that could bring shame to one's life or family can have long-term consequences to the ability to bring honor to the family, simply because the public first saw shame, or in this case the inability to follow through on a decision, to complete the project.

In Jesus' mind, he's describing what it is involved in following him into a future without him, which could get rough. Not only could they be persecuted in ancient times, but trying to right wrongs and fight for justice has never been an easy task, whether ancient or modern times. One of the messages often preached from this scripture is that Christian discipleship is hard. He's inviting people to embrace fighting justice for everyone, especially those that have never gotten a break, like those in poverty or those that have a stigma tied to their neck, like prostitutes and tax collectors. This is not an easy thing, because to be honest, it's never been very popular. It's been easier to be tied to one's own wealth and possessions and self-preservation mindset. Even in Jesus' day, Jesus saw that. He saw that people would rather cling to him without thought, than truly embrace what he was about—a tough but worthwhile road into bringing God's compassion and justice to everyone.

The letting go is the hard part. Letting go of what keeps a Christian disciple from doing just that—embracing justice for all. So, let me share my own experience of heeding the call of discipleship by letting go. One of the things I discovered as a hospital chaplain, is sometimes you're asked to go into rooms of patients who are not popular with the nurses. They are not cooperative, or they are homeless, or they are in for alcohol withdrawal. But to me, those individuals were interesting patients, they were the stories that were fascinating because they're complex not open for snap judgment once you get them to share their story. I enjoyed the fact

that I could be perhaps the first listening ear they'd had, because they'd isolated family members. I didn't always enjoy the stories they told—often full of loss—but I was honored that I offered a non-judgmental presence to them, a way of acknowledging that they too mattered.

The journey there wasn't easy though. Before I stepped into Clinical Pastoral Education, I probably would not have desired to hear their stories, those people whose experiences were so different than mine. It took pain from sharing, and then letting go, of the history that had burned me, the childhood I didn't get to have, the decisions I wish I'd made, the harsh judgments towards myself, the shame that followed. All of these had to be aired out and received with love from my peers and supervisors, but not without a challenge to not just play victim of my circumstances, but to recognize where I'd be better served, such as moving through a process that led to self-compassion instead of self-judgment. I let go of a lot but not without pain.

Maybe this is what Jesus meant by having some forethought before following a discipleship of Christianity—one must move through and let go of experiences that can tie one up from fully being open to people you might be around that others wouldn't but who still need our compassion, because that's what Jesus would do. Jesus is also asking his group to thinking about what would they need to give up to fully embrace Jesus' theology of embracing the bitter with the sweet surrounding building a Kingdom of God. But what exactly is Jesus saying that involves?

Modern scholars, essayists about this scripture do not necessarily agree that we are asked to give up every belonging and property one owns to be a disciple. Back in ancient days, he may have meant that is what is required. He's only saying give up that which will get in the way of being a Christian who fights for justice and compassion—ties to people who pull you the other

way or into unethical behavior; idolizing wealth above anything else. And he asks us to think about what letting go might mean to our future.

As someone who is passionate about fighting injustice, and embracing the stories and people whom others view as unwanted, I still don't like letting go of habits and tendencies toward wanting more than I need, trappings that may keep me from the calling God has for me. I frankly still like to stay safe, not get out of my comfort zone. However if I'm continue on what ordination means to me, following where God leads, I have to let go that which would keep me safe, which may mean leaving Utah. But just like the prophet Jeremiah, as much as we don't always want to be a leader, God is asking of us otherwise, God is speaking through us towards a justice-filled society, wherever that may lead.

I encourage this community to continue to heed the call of discipleship, wherever that may lead you. It may not be an easy road. It may mean letting go of ideas that no longer serve you. But just know that as long as you know you're in the spirit of God, just as those following Jesus knew they were, you will be led to your role at building the Kingdom of God. May God be with you all.