

Servanthood: Take up your Cross

Two Vital Questions to ask when you have heard the Call of God to Serve

(Acts 9:1-6 NKJV) "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest {2} and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. {3} As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. {4} Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" {5} And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." {6} So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.""

Who are you (in my life) Lord? What do You want me to do, Lord?



- What is the significance of these two questions?
- How will the answers help you respond to your call to serve and reach your potential?

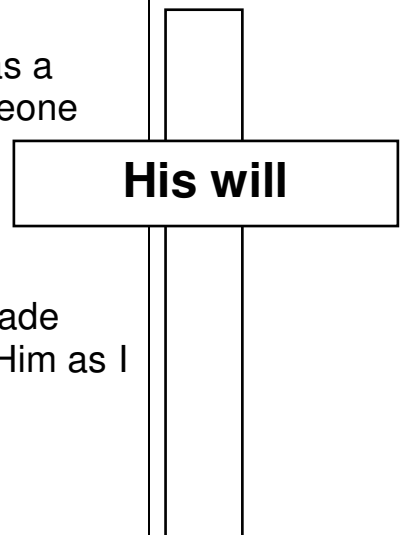
(Galatians 2:20 NKJV) "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The Apostle Paul wrote:

"I have shared the Lord's experience of crucifixion... Not as a spectator, Not as someone who read about it, Not as someone who heard someone else tell about it..."

But as a determined participant who welcomed the painful nailing of my will to the cross of His will!

Because of this pain-filled experience, I have now been made alive to a brand new life of total trust and dependence on Him as I serve the good pleasure of His will."



(Luke 9:23-26 NKJV) “Then He said to them all, **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.** {24} For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. {25} For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? {26} For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.””

Your Required Commitment

Deny yourself.

Take up your cross.

Follow Me.



- Deny who?
- How often?
- Follow who?

Imagine if the Lord Jesus was standing on the street and you walked by. What if He said, **“Hey, I have this heavy cross for you to carry. Do you mind if I lay it on your back? Oh, by the way, I also have these big nails.”**

Jesus says, “If you want to answer the call and go with Me where I am going...

1. Deny what is special, important, and privileged about yourself. Just turn your back on it, deny it!
2. Deny what you have gained, all your comforts and riches. Just deny them!
3. Deny what has made you comfortable. Just deny it!
4. Deny what has been giving you pleasure. Just deny it!
5. Commit to being the kind of servant to the will of the Father that I was.

Oh, that is not quite all I require.

I want you to carry this painfully heavy wooden cross of service around every day as you follow me. By the way, from time to time you will find yourself struggling and hurting under the weight of the thing or even painfully nailed to it.”

The Lord says, “What do you think? How is that for an invitation? Will you follow me? Will you willingly give up all, and do whatever is necessary to serve my will as you walk with me?”

These are very heavy questions!

*(Matthew 4:18-19 NKJV) "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. {19} Then He said to them, "**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.**""*

**"FOLLOW ME
AND
I WILL MAKE YOU
FISHERS OF MEN."**

**A promise...
Distinguished by what it did not
promise!**

Jesus did not promise that answering the call to serve would bring...

- An easy life
- Wealth, fame or worldly success.

**He only promised to take them fishing for men.
They left everything behind and immediately followed Him.**

**A promise...
Distinguished by what it did not promise!**

Many who serve identify with Christ for a season, expecting to get something in return.



- What should you expect when you answer the call to serve?

You should expect that there is no greater joy or reward than what you see in the people you have. They will give back to you love and respect. Will that be more than enough? It must be.



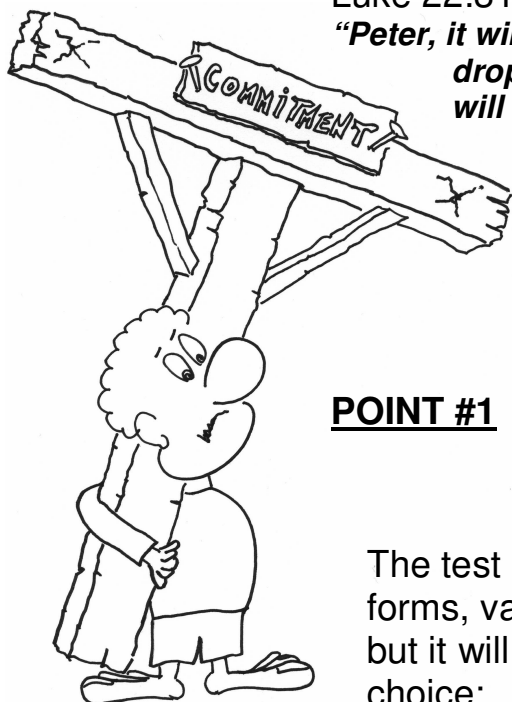
Some of the people you try to serve will reject your service and even hurt you. Will you take up an offense and give up serving?

Jesus only promised to make His disciples fishers of men. Eleven of them committed to a lifetime of serving Him! There were no demands and not any particularly high expectations. They just served Him. None of them served Him perfectly. Each had his own temptations and failures.

Luke 22:31-34 Paraphrase:

“Peter, it will not take very long today before you drop your cross at the side of the road. You will deny your loyalty and attachment to me.

You will throw the cross down violently and flee from it... And by the way, it will not just be once, but three times. Peter, I am sorry to say that you will fail the test this morning.”



POINT #1 Your day of testing in ministry to the Lord is inevitable. It will surely come!

The test may come wrapped in many forms, varieties and packages... but it will always unwrap itself to be a choice:



You will deny Jesus or you will deny self.

What Kind of Test?

- A test of will
- A test of affection
- A test of determination
- A test of covenant

(What have you promised Jesus? What has gone from your lips to His?)

You may have walked with Jesus.
You may have talked with Jesus.
You may have eaten with Jesus.
You may have worked miracles for Jesus.

You may have preached for Jesus.
But...

The test is coming. Will you throw your cross down, or you will plant it and willingly climb onto it?



What causes some who serve in ministry to throw down their crosses at the side of the road and stop serving Christ?

Why do others plant their crosses whenever and wherever Jesus asks... and willingly spread their hands?

Cause and Effect: Dropped Crosses

Cause:

Luke 22:54 NKJV

*“Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest’s house. **But Peter followed at a distance.**”*

Effect:

*(Luke 22:55-60 NKJV) “Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. {56} And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, “This man was also with Him.” {57} **But he denied Him**, saying, “Woman, I do not know Him.” {58} And after a little while another saw him and said, “You also are of them.” **But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”** {59} Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, “Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean. {60} **But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are saying!”** Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.”*

“BUT PETER FOLLOWED AT A DISTANCE.”

POINT #2 If you follow Jesus at a distance, you will one day fail the test. You will drop your cross!

Why?

If Jesus is too distant for you to touch Him (and that is always your choice, not His), then at some critical moment of your service, you will have to pass a test in your own weak human nature. None of us has the strength to crucify ourselves. Without being close to Christ, we will drop our crosses and walking away.

The only way to have the strength to crucify “self” when the going gets ugly is to cling to the Lord, to be close to Him, whether it’s comfortable or not! A relationship that continues to grow closer to the Lord is not optional. It is the difference between life and death, success and failure, and an eternity of fruitfulness or fruitlessness.

A SERVANT’S PRIMARY PRINCIPLE

Hang out with Him closely. When He asks... hang outstretched with Him just as closely.

*(Luke 22:61, 62) “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” {62} **So Peter went out and wept bitterly.**”*

Peter wept because he had stayed back and dropped his cross. When the test came, Peter could not find any strength in a commitment that held something back from Jesus.

It is easy to stay close to Jesus when things are pleasant and the crowd is friendly. However, when your ministry is on the spot, and the name of Christ is mocked... and you are identified with Him *what will you do?*



- Will you stand in the shadows and deny?
- Maybe the test is just around the corner. Maybe it will come ten years from now. Maybe you have just failed a test, and nobody but God knows.

But... Peter followed at a distance.

POINT #3 God sorrows for the distance between you and Him. He knows it keeps you from His strength... and puts limits on your potential.

Your life and ministry can be lived by faith in the Son of God. Your service in the church can become an experience filled with the power of the Son of God – filled with hope, promise and glory.

POINT #4 Readiness and strength to pass the test only comes from closeness to Christ.



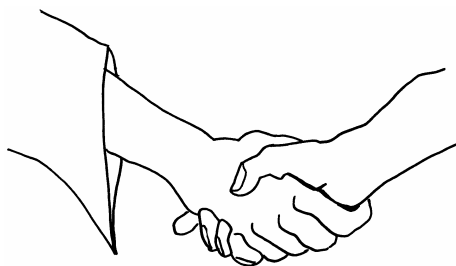
- How will you close the gap?
- How will you crucify the distance?

POINT #5 God’s servant-leaders open their hands and take the nails they are offered. There is always God’s strength in your sacrificial service.

It is very simple. Follow Jesus, but not at a distance. Get so close that the fire that burns in His eyes ignites a fire in your heart. Be so close to Him that there is no distance, no darkness, no coldness between you and Him. Let your love for Him draw you to the altar of sacrifice. Imitate that love as you minister to others.

Practical Steps to Your Crucifixion

1. Open your hands. Loosen your grip on any sin, or potential for sin. Sin hates you. Crucify it before it crucifies you.
2. Open your hands. Loose your grip on the fear of what people might see and say if they really saw inside of you. Let down the walls and trust God.
3. Open your hands. Loose your grip on the fear of letting God direct your life and ministry. Get out of the driver's seat. Let go of the steering wheel. Let God direct your steps.
4. Open your hands. Embrace others and value them as God's gift to you. Do not neglect the people you love and serve.
5. Take up the cross of your responsibilities. Refuse to drop it - ever!
6. When you have opened and emptied your hands, get in His grip and hang on!



A Final Truth to Share

It was never a hammer in the hand of an enemy that crucified Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was His submission to the will of God the Father. This submission was only possible because of His closeness to God the Father. Jesus passed the test in the context of His oneness with God. You can too!

The Lord Jesus Christ's weapons in the battle were no different from your weapons. His weapons were:

1. His closeness to God
2. His undeniable communion and prayer with God
3. His unstoppable determination to see the will of the Father accomplished in His life.

Christ nailed Himself to the cross with the hammer of His own will and three days later, He celebrated absolute victory. He took the

kingdom by force with His own determination to love and serve the Father. He did all this, and then called you to be His ambassador, His representative, His voice!



How much will you look like, act like, think like, love like and sacrifice like Jesus did?

You are a winner and a champion for Christ. When people see you, they should see Him.

The Conclusion of the Matter

If you want resurrection power, you must first have a crucifixion. If you want to take your kingdom by force, do it by the force of your surrender to the will of God. You are called to be a pastor or leader of great, eternal significance. Do not lose sight of the prize that is set before you. Draw closer to Him and become more like Him. Give Him the glory!

*Blessings,
Dr. Bob*