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URGENT PRIORITY

Luke 9:61-62 *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In this, the last of three practical lessons about discipleship for the trainee apostles, Jesus taught them to understand what lay behind delaying and evading tactics from would-be disciples. Saying farewell to family seems to be only courteous, a way to let them know that an exciting new path of life has opened up. But in Jesus' day and culture, 'goodbye' would take at least three days and possibly a week as relatives gathered. By that time, Jesus would have moved on and the opportunity would have gone.

The apostles were going to encounter many who were attracted by the gospel truth but were not wholehearted. The temptation to look back (like Lot's wife in [Genesis 19:24-26](#)) is rooted in our sinful nature. So, Jesus called for a distinct break from the past and condemned the duplicity of trying to look in two directions at the same time: such a person is not fit to be a disciple. And it seems that Jesus is making clear that discipleship is as hard a lifestyle as that of the ploughman. When ploughing a furrow, the only way to ensure that you plough straight and cover the ground properly is to fix your eyes on a point ahead, at the end of the field. For Jesus: that point was the cross.

But for us, our eyes need to be focussed ready to see Jesus returning in glory. His appearing will mark the completion of His saving work in us, as well as the judgement of the world which has rebelled. Those two end-points are completely opposite to each other; so to attempt to live in both directions will produce dangerous personal instability ([James 1:8](#)) and must be repented of before it is too late ([James 4:8](#)). The workplace may tempt us to look back; friends and colleagues may discourage us from being wholehearted for Jesus; but He has set the example and we must follow ... as it says in [Hebrews 12:2-3](#): "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*"

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for making Your Word so clear in this passage. I know that You are calling me to be Holy in my living because I am single minded in my faith, looking towards Jesus alone. Please forgive me for the many times when I fail in this, destabilising myself and others as I divert my eyes away from the goal of Your return and the glories of Your presence for ever. Forgive me too, when I fail to respond immediately to Your instructions and promptings. Help me to seize each God-given opportunity. And give me an undivided heart settled on pleasing Jesus, despite the temptations and pressures in my family and workplace to compromise. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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RADICAL PRIORITY

Luke 9:59-60 *He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Following Jesus, if it is done properly, is not a whim or personal preference. It is a conscious decision to obey the call of Christ. Today's passage is the second of three encounters recorded between Jesus and would-be disciples. Jesus issues this man with the call to follow Him. It is quite clear: the Greek puts it in the present tense, the active voice and the imperative mood. In other words, 'do it and do it now!' But the man's response denied all three: he did not see it as an instruction for that moment, he had no indication of taking action and he had no urgency about Christ's command.

The expression, "...bury my father", probably did not mean his father had died, but that he would consider the call to discipleship when his father was dead. He would then have received his share of the inheritance and fulfilled all that was expected of him as a son in the family. Jesus' response seems quite cutting. He was saying that those who had no interest in obeying God's call (the spiritually dead) could deal with the filial obligations expected in the earthly society. But those who recognised the privilege of being in God's family would set His priorities as their own.

Family relationships are God designed and should be very precious. But nothing can be more precious than accepting and obeying God's call. However much a relationship is special, it must never be more important than our relationship with the God who made us and the Saviour who died for us. His call on our lives, to proclaim the supremacy of His kingdom and His grace, is the primary priority. The Lord does not want us to dishonour our family, but when we use them as an excuse to disobey our heavenly Father, we dishonour both Him and His calling of us. Yet [Mark 10:29-30](#) tells us that those who obey the call will find that God blesses them in a greater way than they could ever have experienced in the way of the world.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God and loving Heavenly Father. Thank You for the family into which I have been placed, and all the good things that have come to me through them. Thank You too for the responsibility of care and serving others, which have come with those privileges. However I know that You are my Great Father and that Your Word is higher than any other. I accept Your call to work with You. So please help me to make the radical choices necessary to honour and obey You, trusting that You will resolve everything that is yet to be done in my family. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TRAVELLING WITHOUT COMFORTS

Luke 9:57-58 *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus was popular; at least He was at this stage of His ministry. He attracted a following of those who admired Him and wanted to identify with His wisdom and wonderfully powerful deeds. This man was one of those. He wanted to follow Jesus wherever He went. But he did not understand that the Saviour was going to the cross. Rapturous applause would be replaced by ridicule and the wisest man alive would refuse to answer impertinent questions at a mock trial before going to His death. None of the disciples understood either.

So Jesus gently explained what they could grasp. He may have been feted by the crowds, but He had no home. At the end of every day, He slept on a borrowed bed or stayed up at night praying to Father God. He was literally 'on a mission', and had no time for the trappings of a celebrity lifestyle. Those who followed Him would suffer the same inconvenience and apparent uncertainty of their day-to-day lives. Even foxes know where they are safe and birds have a familiar perch; but for Jesus, every day and night was different and nowhere guaranteed safety.

Interestingly, the church grows best when it is under persecution. But Christians who have settled into the luxuries of pleasantly predictable lifestyles have little incentive to risk their friendships, reputation, employment, liberty or lives. However, all around the world today, where those threats present a daily challenge, those who live for Christ shine much more brightly. It is as though comforts lull us into a false security that all is well, when really we are living in a world that is under the judgement of God. Only His grace can save us, and only His gospel tells of how to receive what He freely offers. If we are true followers of Jesus Christ we must risk the dangers of living and speaking like Jesus. Meanwhile, whatever your situation, please pray for your brothers and sisters who suffer more than you do.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for the wonderful example of Jesus who did not invest in money, houses or possessions. Thank You that He was never deflected from His mission by surrounding Himself with personal comforts. Please forgive me when I have done that and ignored my responsibilities as a follower of Jesus. And now I pray that You will strengthen my brothers and sister throughout the world - those whose comforts have been taken away, or who have chosen to forsake them for the sake of the gospel. May Your promises be their daily encouragement, knowing that they are following in the steps of the Lord Jesus Christ. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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REBUKE No. 4

Luke 9:51-56 *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The disciples had been rebuked for their faithlessness ([Luke 9:41](#)), their competitive pride ([Luke 9:46-48](#)) and for wanting to exclude another believer from ministry ([Luke 9:49-50](#)). Today's passage reveals the fourth rebuke. The cross is now clearly in Jesus' mind with its wonderful salvation to all who believe, but the Twelve wanted to send judgement to a Samaritan village which had no interest in welcoming them.

Jesus rebuked them. They did not understand that the work of Christ on the cross was not to judge the rebellious but to save them, and to give opportunity for sinners to respond to God's grace. Somehow they thought that a power encounter would scare the other Samaritan villages into submission. It was not Jesus' way. He simply moved on and entered another village, displaying the love and power of God to heal, deliver and enlighten dark hearts.

Today's disciples, the believers in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, risk falling into one of two errors. One is like the disciples: they see the church as a hammer to crack the nuts of immorality and false doctrine. They exhibit a harshness that Jesus never displayed towards those who seek His mercy. The other error is to have little fear of the coming judgement and to live life selfishly with no urgency to communicate the gospel and urge others to receive Christ before it is too late. The wise Christian will both revel in the grace and mercy of Christ's salvation and also be in awe of His second coming in judgement. Such a spiritual outlook will spur their devotion and worship, excite them to press forwards in discipleship and urge them with the priority of making the gospel known among their family, friends and colleagues.

Prayer: *Merciful Lord. Thank You for lavishing Your grace upon me, even though I did not deserve it and rejected Your kindness for so long. Forgive my failings and backslidings and help me to live in the blessing of Your salvation. May I show Your mercy to others and also have an internal sense of urgency to proclaim Your gospel wherever You lead. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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NON-EXCLUSIVE COVENANT

Luke 9:49-50 "Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The disciples knew that they were special to Jesus. He had selected them and trained them and they were indeed loved and chosen. But they extended that idea to feeling that they were exclusively special, and therefore nobody else had a right to minister in Jesus' Name. Although Jesus had just rebuked them as individuals for arguing who was the greatest among them, they again tried to assert their uniqueness - but this time as the group of chosen trainee apostles. Now, there was a sense in which they were unique, as the future foundational apostles of the church ... but they had no monopoly on serving the Lord Jesus Christ. That was to be the privilege of every believer, in different ways, in the centuries to come.

Having found a man who was casting out demons in the Name of Jesus, the disciples tried to prevent his ministry because he was not one of the Twelve. Again Jesus has to rebuke them. If somebody's service is in the Name of Jesus, believing that Jesus has the power and authority to act, then they are also working in God's family business. Only those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of the world will dare to use the Name of Jesus. That Name alone marks out those who are on the Lord's side. Those who deny His Name have no place in gospel ministry.

Alas, down through the ages, the church has repeated the same mistake by 'professionalising' ministry. Many with a good heart and sincere faith have been excluded from representing the Master of time and eternity. Although it is important to have good order in the church, and to ensure that only sound doctrine is taught, professional ministers (people who get 'paid' to be pastors, evangelists, missionaries) should be careful to enable every member who is appropriately gifted to be trained and encouraged to have a part in ministry. The key is, 'the Name of Jesus': those who love His Name, and humbly place themselves under His authority, become disciples who need to be enabled to serve their Lord.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I do love You and I believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord. I know that there are many ways in which I might serve You, so please help me to find out how You want me to minister in the Name of Jesus. Please encourage all 'professional ministers' to see their role as enabling other believers to serve You; and please help Your church to grow as we support and encourage others, even if they worship in a different style to us. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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LESS IS MORE

Luke 9:46-48 *An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and made him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Self-interest always produces arguments (or unexpressed resentment, bitterness and frustration). Perhaps Jesus' selection of Peter, James and John to join Him at the recent transfiguration might have triggered this ego-surge; and Jesus' predictions about His suffering ([Luke 9:44-45](#)) made them worried. Although Jesus was not present when the argument broke out, He knew all about it. So at a convenient moment, He used a child to demonstrate the principles by which His Kingdom operated. Those values would turn worldly standards upside down: or more correctly - the way of the world has so corrupted God's way, that we need God's truth to turn us the right way up!

In putting the child next to Him, Jesus was not saying that we should worship children, or that children are angels who are able to usher us into God's presence! He was simply making the point that as He welcomed children and honoured them, the disciples should do the same. And if they honoured a little child, then they should honour each other by providing whatever kindness was required. Greatness, according to Jesus, is not marked by power but by service, particularly to those who do not appear to deserve it.

Jesus provided the greatest example. He served and honoured us, unworthy sinners, by obeying Father God in suffering for us on the cross. If that is true (and it certainly is!), all ideas of power struggles amongst believers are quite out of order. Nobody has any right to claim superiority over others when our Master humbled Himself to the point of death ([Philippians 2:5-8](#)). It may be more complicated when church organisations have to comply with secular regulations, but the principle still stands - greatness is measured in sacrificial service. So, one of the best ways of showing friends and colleagues what following Christ means, is to be humble enough to serve them and even to serve those people whom they despise.

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for doing so much for me even though I have not deserved any of it. I am amazed at the humility of Christ; even though He was so great He humbled Himself to suffer for me. Please forgive me when I think that I am more important than other believers, or shirk my responsibility to serve those You put in my way. Help me to be refreshed by the truths in today's passage so that I may serve You by serving others however unworthy they may appear to be. In that way, may those who have yet to welcome You, desire to know You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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CODED MESSAGE

Luke 9:43b-45 *While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men." But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

After the glory of the transfiguration, the remarkable healing of a child and the awed amazement of the crowd and disciples, Jesus gathered the Twelve for a briefing. Mark's account gives more detail: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ([Mark 9:31-32](#)). However, they did not understand. They could not reconcile those words with the roller-coaster 'success' of Jesus' ministry and popularity; it did not match their idea of the Messiah. But it was also a message they did not want to receive - Luke said they were frightened about what it might mean, so they did not even ask. But there was another factor. In writing, "... it was hidden from them", Luke implies that the Lord did not intend them to grasp it at that time.

So what was the point in Jesus telling them to listen carefully? Firstly, it was the truth. Secondly, they would need to know that the crucifixion was not a dreadful mistake but all part of God's plan, and accepted by Jesus. Thirdly, they needed their minds moved from success to suffering, as the mark of ministry (Jesus' and theirs in the future). But why was all this obscured from them? Until the events between the cross and ascension had taken place, they would not be able to put the jigsaw of information together to see what God was doing; and even then, they could not see the picture until the Holy Spirit filled their minds and hearts. Until then, they needed to hold on to every word of truth; but when God revealed His wonderful plan of salvation, it could be preached throughout the world.

There are many things we do not understand, and God knows we cannot grasp their significance until all the pieces have been set in place. The Lord may give us enough information to alert and prepare us for the future, and we need to listen carefully so that when the right moment comes, we are ready to obey. But the gospel message is not a mystery any longer ([Colossians 1:25-29](#)). We, who know the way of salvation, can confidently explain it to others (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more). So, whatever is unclear, treasure and ponder, like Mary did ([Luke 2:51](#)), until the Lord shows you what it means. But whatever is clear, rejoice in, obey and share with others!

Prayer: *Dear Father God. Thank You that You reveal Your truth to people at just the right time. Help me also to be willing to wait until the uncertainties in my life are made clear, step by step. So help me today to trust You for the things I cannot yet understand, and for the way I cannot yet see. However, thank You that the gospel message is now fully explained in the Bible, and freely available to all who will receive it. So please help me to be confident to share that message with my friends and colleagues. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SPIRITUAL BATTLE WON

Luke 9:41-43a "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The disciples had failed: and Jesus thoroughly rebuked them for their faithlessness. They had seen so much, and under the authority of Jesus had practised healing the sick and casting out demons, but when the father of a convulsing boy had asked them to heal his child, they had not power to do so. They still did not have a settled faith in the power of the Name of Jesus.

Although the clinical symptoms described by Dr Luke point to a diagnosis of epilepsy, it is clear that Jesus agrees with the father's diagnosis of demonic interference. This is consistent with Satan's strategy of using any area of weakness to give the message that he is in charge. And just to prove the point in front of Jesus, the demon precipitated another convulsion. Jesus addressed the problem head on. He sternly addressed the evil spirit, defying his small authority and banning him from further interference. Then He healed the physical weakness which gave rise to the convulsions and restored the boy, whole, to his father. Everybody, especially the disciples were amazed.

One of Satan's most dirty tricks is to invade people's lives at the point of their weakness. Having stirred sin, sickness and every form of corruption into the world, he then further terrorises those who fall to his temptation or suffer from the effects of sin. And that is how the Evil One continues to trap so many. Only Jesus can release people from such bondage; that is the wonderful message which every believer ought to be able to communicate. Alas, Satan even manages to hold God's people back from that task by turning our weaknesses into a conviction that we cannot work with God. Fear of what people think, fear of failure, fear of rejection, feelings of inadequacy, bad experiences in the past, shaky faith - all of these are springboards from which Satan can launch his attack to repress believers and stop them advertising Christ as the only hope for the world. The disciples had failed: may God give us fresh courage to move forward to minister in the Name of Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I know that You have all power and authority, but I feel my own weakness so severely and I allow Satan to convince me that I cannot work with You. Please forgive me when I let the Evil One capitalise on my weaknesses of body, mind or spirit; holding me in fear so that I cannot move forward with You. Please release me from his grip and fill me again with Your Holy Spirit so that I might be free to serve You in whatever way You command. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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POWERLESS WITHOUT JESUS

Luke 9:37-42 *The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Following the transfiguration experience, Jesus (with Peter, James and John) trekked down the mountain. The other nine disciples were waiting for them, and there was a crowd of people who wanted to see Jesus. One man had come, in desperation, because his only child was constantly in danger from an evil spirit as the boy would often be seized with convulsions. In Jesus' absence, the other disciples had failed to deal with the problem; they were powerless.

Confronted by sickness and Satan's hold over this boy, the disciples were unable to do anything. Yet only a few weeks previously they had been able to heal the sick and cast out demons with the authority of Jesus. Perhaps they thought that they now had the power to do God's work. But it is clear from Jesus' rebuke that they did not really believe and did not pray ([Mark 9:29](#)). Whatever they said to that evil spirit made no difference and the father's patience was running out. So what a relief he must have felt to see Jesus coming down the mountain to meet him. That encounter also revealed the nature of the spiritual encounter as the demon threw the child to the ground. But Jesus demonstrated His supremacy over Satan, who had to leave the boy alone when Jesus rebuked the demon, and then healed the boy.

Today, many people have nowhere else to go with their problems and pain. So you would expect people in need to come to the church or to Christians in the workplace - and they do! But then, what happens? Our task is to announce that Christ has the power to defeat Satan and all his bad works; and to work with Jesus to apply His grace to all who will submit themselves to Him. But that work demands faith and prayer, not a formula. Those who are staying close to Jesus will be able to work with Him; otherwise we remain pathetically powerless.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for all You have done in my life. Please forgive me for the times I have been prayer-less and faithless, and unable to work powerfully for You. Please help me to see the cause of my powerlessness and give me a fresh desire to walk and work closely with You. Lord, increase my faith and strengthen me into a prayer life which will honour You and be a blessing to many others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

LISTEN TO THE ONE WHO KNOWS

Luke 9:34-36 *While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no-one at that time what they had seen. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The transfiguration of Jesus had provoked Peter into an inappropriate response. He did not know what he was saying. However, it was not his fellow disciples who rebuked him, or even Jesus, but Father God Himself. As Peter's words were making a mess of that sacred moment, they were engulfed by the awesome stillness of a dense cloud. Within minutes they had moved from the brilliance surrounding the transfigured Jesus to relative darkness. Fear seized them; at last they knew they were on holy ground: and God had their attention.

Father God made three statements. The first was about the identity of Jesus: He was the Son of the Father. The second was about the commission of Jesus: He was the chosen, anointed Messiah. The third was about the authority of Jesus: His words were God's message to the world (as prophesied in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#)). Peter knew that the message was for him: God did not want any advice or bright ideas from the trainee apostles - He wanted them to know that Jesus was greater than Moses and Elijah and had the full authority of Father God to be in command. Although the apostles were being trained to take that message to the world, first they had to listen and understand it; not make it up as they went along. That day, Peter, James and John understood the awesome message, and kept their mouths shut.

Somebody once said that human beings have been given two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak! The biological importance of having two ears is to enable us to determine where the sound is coming from. Both these thoughts may be helpful. Firstly, we are not God and we can never invent truth: truth is a part of God's nature and unless we receive it from Him, we cannot know it or pass it on. Secondly, it is important to know that Jesus is the only spiritual leader who is authorised to speak for Father God, and only Jesus can authorise others to relay His messages ([Acts 28:18-20](#)). As followers of Jesus, we first need the humility to listen and the discipline to submit our lives to what He says so that we develop transformed minds which are able to discern the will of God ([Romans 12:2](#)), before we can pass it on authentically.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You that I can be confident of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgive me when I assume that I know better than Him, or when I allow any other influence in my life to contradict Him. Please help me to learn to listen to Jesus and His appointed representatives, the apostles, so that I may be able to relay Your messages with integrity and authenticity. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SPEAKING WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

Luke 9:33 *As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Some people seem to have an urge to respond to something they do not understand, by speaking, however inappropriately. That was Peter. The glory covering Jesus and the appearance of Moses and Elijah was way outside his experience, yet he proposed a response.

We do not know the thoughts in Peter's mind, but here are some possibilities: perhaps he felt that he should know what to do, as the most assertive of the three disciples with Jesus on the mountain, and opened his mouth while the others stayed silent. Or, the episode in [Exodus 24:9-11](#) could have been on his mind: when Moses took Aaron, Nadab and Abihu to witness the covenant that God had made, eating together afterwards. Maybe he was fazed by the transfiguration and wanted to find a way of being in control, or to prolong the glorious experience (he spoke as Moses and Elijah were saying farewell to Jesus). Whatever his thoughts, it is obvious that he felt that it was his responsibility to supply traditional hospitality to Jesus (the Messiah), Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets): yet he failed to see that he was there by God's invitation, and Peter was the guest not the host.

It was not until later that the disciples understood the significance of that day ([2 Peter 1:16-21](#)). However, like Peter, we can make similar mistakes when God graciously exposes us to His Word and His power. The truth is that God does many things which we cannot properly understand at the time. Like Job and his companions, God sometimes has to tell us to 'get off the stage', because we are pathetically incompetent to know what God is doing. Rebuking Job, God said, "*Who is that that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?*" ([Job 38:1-2](#)). As [Psalm 46:10](#) says, often our best response to what God allows - is to be still, and know that God is God indeed!

Prayer: *Almighty God. I know that You are so much greater than me in every way. Please forgive me when I attempt to define what I do not understand or to manage Your business without Your authority. Help me to be an attentive observer of what I do not understand, treasuring and pondering all Your words and works in my heart, like Mary did, until You reveal their purpose. Help me to learn a new humility about all I cannot see or understand so that I may grow in awe and confidence that You are truly in command. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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GLORY ASSURED

Luke 9:28-32 *About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had just promised the disciples that their faithfulness would be rewarded when He returned in glory. But was that an empty promise? Until then, everything He said had been fulfilled ... but they were effectively staking their whole lives on this one promise ... how could they be sure? The Lord, who knows everything, knew that they needed assurance in a way they could understand; and so He took Peter, James and John to pray with Him up a mountain. Although the disciples did not really know how to engage in prayer, and almost fell asleep, the changed appearance of Jesus made them fully alert.

This event was so memorable that Peter used it to comfort and strengthen churches under persecution. [2 Peter 1:16-18](#) says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

Many religions encourage faithfulness in their followers, by promising good in the future. But how does anyone know that those promises can be fulfilled? Jesus showed that He could keep all His promises. He spoke of glory, and then showed himself in glory. Moses and Elijah, who had already prophesied about Jesus, now prophesied Him leaving the world as Saviour (in the same way that God led the Israelites out of Egypt to a new life). Jesus not only spoke of new life, but raised three people from the dead before He was also raised. The suffering of Jesus was vindicated by the resurrection - a great encouragement for the suffering church in the years to come. In short, Jesus' words are fully trustworthy. We, who believe in Jesus, have every reason to be completely confident that everything He said will be seen. And we have every reason to recommend Jesus to our friends and family, who have no such certainty.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. Thank You for having demonstrated the truth of Your promises to the apostles, so that their writings assure us of the validity of our faith. In those times when the pressure is on and when doubts unsettle our faith, thank You for Your Holy Word which gives us fresh confidence to trust Your promises and to continue living for Jesus, knowing that today's suffering will seem very small when we share in Your glory. Help me also to be aware of the hopelessness of those who cling to unsubstantiated promises, or who have given up hoping for any good future. May my courageous Jesus-filled life encourage many to turn to Him. In His Name. Amen.*

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SHAME OR GLORY

Luke 9:26-27 *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The early days of being with Jesus must have been very exciting for the disciples. But now the reality of His mission (and theirs) was being spelled out. In order to fulfil God's plan of defeating the bad works of Satan, and rescuing people who have been held in his grip, Jesus would have to sacrifice His own life. Not only that, but every true disciple would have to make their lives available for anything God wanted (and deny themselves what they wanted). Discipleship should not be thought of as leisure time entertainment in a playground, but a commitment to spiritual warfare, with all the discomforts and casualties that come with a battleground.

It was hard teaching. So Jesus challenged them that if the idea was offensive to them, and they wanted to back out, they needed to know that they would be excluded from the great victory celebration when Jesus returns in glory. That would be a real event (not some sort of religious fiction). Peter, James and John would shortly see Jesus gloriously transfigured - an experience confirming the truth of what Jesus was saying, and encouraging the disciples to stay true to Jesus all the way.

Following Jesus is not just about getting God to fix today's problems. It is intended to be a long-term relationship where we work with Him in God's 'family business' (as He deals with sin and its consequences, and prepares the 'family' for a glorious eternal future). Yes, short-term we will need to endure some of the 'battlefield trauma', but long-term we will also share the joys of Christ's victory and the glory of His kingdom. However those who are ashamed of the sufferings of Jesus, and who do not want to be associated with God's salvation-work, cannot share in His glory. It was a radical choice for the disciples, and not all of them chose well: Judas was ashamed of Jesus, and lost everything. It is still a radical choice for every believer, every day at home and at work. So, even if others ridicule your faith in Christ for a little while, don't be ashamed of Jesus; because He will honour for ever those who stand with Him now.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for this fresh reminder that my relationship with You is for the 'long-term', and so my decisions about day to day behaviour need to be shaped by my hope of glory with Jesus. Forgive me for so much short-term and selfish thinking, and for even wanting to use You to fix my problems so that I can continue to be selfish! Help me, when others mock my faith in You, to stand up for Jesus; knowing that He will stand by all those who honour Him - both now and in eternity to come. May I also be willing to witness to my family and friends who mock You, knowing that they need to hear and respond to the gospel message before Jesus returns. In His Name. Amen.*

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DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT

Luke 9:23-25 *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. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The secret was out! Jesus had agreed that Peter was right; the Master was none other than the anointed Son of God. He had come to defeat the evil intentions of Satan ([1 John 3:8](#)); and now the battle was out in the open. The days of rollercoaster popularity were over; from now on the opposition would intensify: it would lead Jesus to the cross. But that was not all: those who wanted to follow Him would need to go to their cross too.

The 'cross of discipleship' for most of the Twelve would not end in physical death by wood and nails, but a voluntary denial of all that pleased the selfish nature. In obeying Father God, Jesus did not please Himself (even in Gethsemane and Golgotha); and no disciple had any right to please themselves either. Alas, one disciple (Judas Iscariot) would make the wrong decision and become a vivid example of the dangers of apostasy. So the Master laid it on the line: either choose to lose the right to please yourself, or lose the privilege of eternal life! It was a very stark message which cut through the popularity culture surrounding Jesus, because there is no point in getting everything that this world offers and then losing all that Jesus would die to gain for those who love and obey Him.

The key to true discipleship is still the willing, voluntary, obedient choice to deny the flesh what it wants; so that we can give to God what He commands. For Jesus it was His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world ... for us it is to sacrifice what we desire. However much we rationalise holding onto our right to please ourselves, these words of Jesus put our selfish fleshliness into His Divine perspective. So, if you have been playing at being a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is time to get real: if you have been resisting God's will, it is time to submit: if you have felt the pain of self-sacrifice and are tempted to turn back ... remember Jesus. As [Hebrews 12:2-3](#) says, "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*"

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You for this reminder that my walk with You is not measured in religious rituals but in self sacrifice and obedience to Your call. Please forgive me for the many times when I have demanded my right to what I want. Help me to understand the nature of Christ's sacrifice and therefore be willing to follow Him in giving up my personal rights in order that I may follow Him more closely. Please give me Your grace to keep living as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. In His Name. Amen.*

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DANGEROUS IDENTITY

Luke 9:21-22 *Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and many other languages*

Peter had just declared that Jesus was the promised Messiah - God's specially anointed person to represent heaven on earth. But this new realisation of who Jesus was, became the beginning of the road to the cross, because even religious people would prefer God to be remote, and not close up and personal. They acted as 'brokers' between God and the people, and enjoyed all the perks of the 'middle man'. But now it was clear, at least to the disciples, that Jesus was not just another religious 'broker': He carried the full authority of the Godhead. So if people could come straight to God by coming to Jesus, the religious hierarchy would become irrelevant. And so it proved to be. But more than that, the 'establishment' would fight back. The only way to maintain their power and social position was to kill Jesus.

The idea of God on your doorstep is frightening to religious leaders who hide behind shadowy mysticism to maintain their power grip over people. The church has always been tempted to go back to those Old Testament days in which direct access to God was almost impossible; when the system of priests and sacrifices provided the only way. Yet Jesus is both the great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice for sins - all we need is Jesus, not a 'religious broker'! Yes, we need evangelists to explain the gospel; teachers to help believers to understand God's Word; and pastors to encourage us to do what it says. But we come to God through Jesus Christ alone.

However, the rebellious human heart still wants to be in control, and finds it uncomfortable having God too close; even for those who are religious. So the old struggle over the dangerous identity of Jesus continues. To resist Him is to be in danger of His wrath, but to submit is to place oneself into potential danger from those people who hate to be reminded of God's presence too close! However, those who submit to the Lord also know His Holy Spirit's presence to protect them through the dangers and give them joy as they witness to His powerful salvation.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that I do not worship an unknown deity, but in Jesus I can know what You are like, and have the authorisation to approach You directly through the blood of Christ. Yet I know that those who resist Your love will also at times dislike any reminder that You are the King because they do not want to submit to You. Please help me not to be afraid of them and to witness clearly to my faith in You, knowing that only Your gospel can save people from Your wrath and bring them into the freedom of being children of God. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Luke 9:18-20 *Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The moment had come to challenge the disciples about Jesus' identity. Having spent time praying to Father God, the Lord turned to ask His followers who the people in the crowd thought He was. His teaching and miracles alone could not define Him: unlike people who achieve greatness because of their achievements, Jesus was great because He had always been the Son of God.

The first question was oblique - what was the crowd saying about Him? The only people they could use as reference points were the Old Testament prophets like Elijah, or the more recent John the Baptist. Those people were God's servants, speaking truth and doing miracles. But was Jesus just a prophet? Peter's response was clear ... Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) of God.

The same question is important today, "*But what about you, who do you say I am*"? The answer does not so much define Jesus, as us. [1 John 4:15](#) says, "*If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*" Many will say Jesus is just a teacher, prophet, good man, great example etc; but they have all missed the point, and cannot claim to enjoy God's living presence. But those who can say without hesitation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, do so because they have a relationship with Him and have received His Spirit. Evangelistically, it is a great diagnostic question and takes your conversation right to the heart of the Gospel. It will challenge your friends to think about the unique person of Jesus Christ and their relationship with Him. Pray, and then look for the opportunity to ask what people think about Jesus - it will open the way for you to tell them what you think, and why!

Prayer: *Eternal God. Thank You that the Lord Jesus Christ is far more than the sum of His teachings and miracles. Thank You for helping me to believe in Him. So thank You for this important question which helps me to reaffirm my faith in Him; and provides a wonderful conversational springboard. So, please help me to talk with my friends and colleagues about the Saviour of the world who loves me and them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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POWERFUL PROVISION

Luke 9:14-17 (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each." The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The disciples had failed the challenge to feed the people, even with Jesus' instruction and authority. So then Jesus stepped in, but He made sure that the disciples were not just passive observers. They were ordered to sit the men down in manageable groups, and they did what they were told. With the people sitting, ready for the meal, Jesus simply lifted the five loaves and two fish in thanksgiving to Father God. Then as He broke the food into pieces, more pieces appeared until there was enough to feed the five thousand, and one whole basketful of surplus food for each disciple. The Twelve worked with Jesus, seating the crowd, distributing the food and collecting what was left over.

How much they must have learned that day! The trainee apostles had failed the first test of obedience, but Jesus did not dismiss them and thereafter do everything Himself; He still wanted them to learn by doing. Their fragile faith had been rebuilt during that afternoon because Jesus did not want them to be overcome by defeat, and so He led them to work with Him again. Some might say that they had never seen a 'feeding miracle' so how could they be expected to do one? But that is the whole point about God's powerful acts; it is His power and not ours. As someone has said, "God does not want our ability but our availability"!

God is very merciful; He does not give up on us when we fail Him. He may rebuke but also He encourages us to the limit of our faith, so that we might grow in faith and learn to trust Him more. He does not only choose 'A grade students', He works with us as we are, giving us another opportunity after we fail, and encouraging us to work with Him in little things. In this narrative, the disciples were not disadvantaged at all; in fact, they had more food than they could eat. What graciousness! How kind Jesus is to those who fail Him and disappoint themselves! If you have recently been a failure and now think that the Lord cannot possibly want you to be with Him and work for Him, think again! He does not discard failures; He remakes them so that they can succeed with Him next time ... if they are willing to be available.

Prayer: Gracious God. You are amazingly powerful and yet astonishingly merciful. Thank You for the times when You have not dismissed me because of my weak faith but have encouraged me to work with You in other ways; so that Your work is done and my faith is strengthened. Help me to be willing to answer Your call, especially if I have failed You previously. May I know that Your love is the motive of Your relationship with me and that I need not be afraid to step out in faithful obedience whenever You speak to me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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REVERTING TO NATURAL THINKING

Luke 9:12-13 *Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish--unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Sometimes we are very slow learners, especially when it comes to faith. The disciples had just been away on mission, preaching, healing sick people and expelling demons. Now they were surrounded by people again; listening to Jesus. By the end of the day (which the Twelve thought was to be their 'rest day'), they came to Jesus supposing to express concern for the crowd's welfare (although the disciples probably just wanted the day to finish and the crowds to go away!).

There were no shops or guest houses nearby and the evening was approaching. So Jesus set them a test - possibly to see how much they had learned during their time on mission. He commanded them to feed the people. Their reply was, "Impossible!" Five loaves and two fish could not feed five thousand men, and the cost of ordering food would have been prohibitive; and anyway, there was nowhere locally which could supply such a large quantity. Alas, they were thinking naturally. But just a few days previously they had been doing amazing miracles with Jesus' authority, yet now they were incapable of seeing that Jesus had given them authority to feed the crowd miraculously.

Are we not also infected with the disease of spiritual short-sightedness? Even though we may have experienced the amazing power of God, the next moment we can easily revert to natural thinking. We cannot see what God wants to do through us, we do not realise that Christ's command is accompanied by His power, and we fail to grow in faith as we give up on the spiritual challenge. Sometimes, like the disciples, we can be more motivated by self-interest than seeing the challenges as God's opportunity to demonstrate His powerful Kingdom. The disciples did not do well with that test of faith: but we have been given their bad example to read, so that we do not make the same mistake. So when the Lord asks us to do something - instead of telling Him it is impossible, ask Him how to do it and move forwards in faith!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. How long-suffering You are with Your people, including me! Forgive me for failing to grasp the challenges You set before me - either because I am not interested in working with You, or because I can only see impossibility. I know that because You have all power and authority, nothing is impossible with You. Help me to see that Your Word of command authorises me to obey and to call on Your power, so that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Help me to rise to each challenge You set me, and help me to respond in faith; believing that I can do what You command and so fulfil Your commission. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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REPORT, REST AND KEEP GOING

Luke 9:10-11 *When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Ministry training with Jesus was unpredictable. After much observing, the disciples had been sent out in twos to preach, heal and cast out demons under the authority of Jesus. On their return they had much to report to the Lord, and to share with the others. So He took them away from the crowds of Capernaum to the relative quietness of Bethsaida (near where the River Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee). But word spread, and soon the people were trekking round the lake or following by sea to find Jesus. The holiday was over, the time of retreat disappeared, the period of reflection had been overtaken by yet more ministry.

Their tiredness, excitement and tales of spiritual encounters had to be put to one side in order to welcome those seeking Jesus, and to explain how they could enter His Kingdom. The needy clustered around Jesus, expecting that He would heal them, and He did. The disciples were back to their role of helpers and observers, as though the previous few weeks had never happened. But this was also ministry training. In the years ahead, they would have to endure much personal difficulty in sharing the gospel, with a programme and timetable that was outside their control.

The Christian life is 24/7. And our availability to work for Jesus should be the same. But in many parts of the world, the 'professionalism' of Christianity may have misled those whose working life is 'outside the church' into thinking that serving Jesus is a spare time (if I have got time), leisure activity. Not so! Jesus has the right to call on any of His people, at any time and in any place, to work with Him. Indeed there should be a real expectation that He will do so. A useful guide is: wherever you meet people, God may want to be at work through you. And when there is nobody else around, God wants to work in you through prayer and the scriptures. Instead of resenting the responsibility, every believer needs to keep re-learning that they are here to work with Him at His command; and with every God-sent task, there is a God-given supply of power, love and grace. If you are ready and willing for God to use you, He will!

Prayer: *Loving Heavenly Father. Thank You for this reminder that my calling is to be Your child and a fully functional part of Your 'family business' of seeking the lost and demonstrating the wonders of Your kingdom. Forgive me when I think of my service for You as 'doing church' and not realising that I am to be available to You all the time - so that You can work through me. So help me to take advantage of the quiet times to learn from Your word and to pray; and help me in the busy times to see the people around me as those who need to find their answers in Jesus. May I be willing to be available whenever You need me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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