

THE WAY

Hey everyone and welcome back to our brand new series, The Way where we're talking about following Jesus. Last week we discovered that Jesus has gone before us to prepare a place for us in heaven and that there are not many ways, but rather one way – The Way through Him. If we want to be where Jesus is we need to follow Him and Him alone.

This week, we're going to look at a passage in scripture where Jesus turned to a crowd that was following Him and warned them to stop following Him unless they had done this first. What was this critical step that so many Christians overlook and how we can make sure we are prepared to follow Jesus?

Back in 2014, my wife Jalee and I, along with two other friends, hiked the Na Pali coast on Kauai and spent 3 days camping at Kalalau beach. Because there was no electricity, phone reception, or running water, everything we needed had to be backpacked across the 22-mile roundtrip hike. Every inch of our backpacks had to be packed precisely with the bare essentials.

Leading up to our trip, Jalee and I would do weighted practice hikes on nearby trails to build the endurance and stamina needed to make the trek. Every item we packed was weighed and evenly distributed to balance that weight. If our bags exceeded our set weight or were off-balance during our practice hikes we would unpack everything, redistribute each item or get rid of certain things based on necessity.

It was a tedious process of trial and error but by the time we hit the trail, we had everything dialed in and came away from the experience with zero injuries, only life-long memories and a desire to do it all again.

When something significant is at stake, such as backpacking across the Na Pali coast, getting married, bringing a child into the world, or starting a new job, you do your due diligence to make sure you are prepared for the journey ahead.

The more important that thing is, the more your priorities need to shift. I remember when my first kid was born I sold my motorcycle. After my second kid, there went the x-box. With a third kid, I'm already nailing down my dive gear and surf boards! It's just like that backpack. Sometimes, life becomes too heavy or off-balanced and we need to re-examine, redistribute or even release certain things.

1. What significant milestones in your life caused you to make adjustments to the way you were living?

THE WAY

First-time parents look at their home through new eyes as they imagine all of the potential hazards that could befall their new baby. Sharp corners, exposed outlets, small objects. They make the necessary preparations. As their wedding day approaches, a young couple will select vendors, place deposits, and make sure they have enough saved to cover the cost. They're making the necessary preparations. Many high school seniors are busy applying for schools and scholarships or applying for jobs – they're making the necessary preparations.

To be unprepared in life is not just irresponsible but can even be detrimental to your future. Imagine those first-time parents bringing their child into a home filled with hazards or that newly-wed couple starting their marriage off with crippling debt due to poor budgeting.

But if being prepared for earthly endeavors is important, how much more so should we be prepared to follow Jesus? In today's passage, Jesus shows us how to prepare to follow Him.

We find our story in Luke 14, where Jesus was beginning to amass a crowd of followers. They were ready to begin their journey with Christ and were standing at the trail-head of their Christian walk. But before they could continue on, Jesus issues a stern warning of what it will cost to follow Him to the end.

"²⁵ As massive crowds followed Jesus, He turned to them and said, ²⁶ "When you follow me as my disciple, you must put aside your father, your mother, your wife, your sisters, your brothers; it will even seem as though you hate your own life. This is the price you'll pay to be considered one of my followers," (Luke 14:25-26 TPT).

2. What point was Jesus trying to make about following Him?

Jesus could see into the hearts of those following Him. He knew their motives. Some followed for blessings, others for provision, and others for healing. Today, people follow Jesus for many reasons. Maybe you want Jesus to fix your marriage. Maybe you're hoping your kids will turn out ok – that they'll be well-behaved. Maybe you follow Jesus so that He'll bless your business. But Jesus is saying, in order to be My follower, you need to put those things aside.

Hold on! What are you saying Pastor Mark? That Jesus doesn't want to fix my marriage? Doesn't Jesus want what's best for my kids? Doesn't Jesus want me to prosper and be successful?

Maybe. But is that your destination? In other words, do you see Jesus as a path to a better marriage or do you see your marriage as a path to Jesus? Do you see Jesus as a path to better kids or do you see your family as a path to Jesus? Is Jesus your path to a successful business or is your business a pathway to Jesus? What is your destination?

THE WAY

You see, Jesus is the journey. He's the beginning and the end, and everything in between. Everything else in your life serves a purpose on the journey but those things are not the journey, and if they become the journey you will not reach your destination. Jesus is The Way. Those things are not the way. Your marriage is not the way, your children are not the way, your business is not the way, your family is not the way. They may serve along the way but if they become your way you will lose your way.

And this is where so many followers of Jesus lose their way. Why? Because it's such a seemingly small deviation – just a matter of degrees. I mean it's not as if I'm pursuing drugs or a life of crime over Jesus! How many of us know, the devil doesn't need to use bad things when he knows good things will keep you from God things. The world tells us to put family first, put your marriage first, put your kids first. Jesus says to put Him first.

3. What is your destination in life? Are there areas of your life that could become your 'Way' apart from Jesus?

In 1979 a passenger jet carrying 257 people left New Zealand for a sightseeing flight to Antarctica and back. Unknown to the pilots, however, there was a minor 2 degree error in the flight coordinates. This placed the aircraft 28 miles to the east of where the pilots thought they were. As they approached Antarctica, the pilots descended to a lower altitude to give the passengers a better look at the landscape. Although both were experienced pilots, neither had made this particular flight before. They had no way of knowing that the incorrect coordinates had placed them directly in the path of Mount Erebus, an active volcano that rises from the frozen landscape to a height of more than 12,000 feet. Sadly, the plane crashed into the side of the volcano, killing everyone on board. It was a tragedy brought on by a minor error—a matter of only a few degrees. Proverbs 16:25 says,

"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death,"
(Proverbs 16:25 NLT).

A few degrees off over time leads to destruction in the end.

As parents, there are going to be times when our children want to do things that go against God's Word. Maybe all of their friends are doing it and you're starting to look like the bad guy. Are you going to stay on God's path even though it's unpopular or will you deviate just a few degrees?

Maybe you're a young person who wants to be in a relationship and all of your friends are pressuring you to act a certain way in order to find love and be accepted. Or maybe you're in a relationship being pressured to do things God doesn't approve of. It may seem like just a few degrees. But who's favor do you want more? God's or man's?

THE WAY

God may call you to give sacrificially and it can be so easy to convince yourself that there are better ways to use that money – my kid's education, a downpayment on a house. But what is your final destination?

4. In what ways do you think the Church in America has strayed a few degrees from what Jesus taught?

Jesus is warning us at the very beginning, that as you follow Him, there will be times when the road forks and you'll need to decide what your destination is. Is Jesus just a means to an end or is He The Way? He goes on to warn us that it's not always back-seat drivers that deters us, it's us!

"²⁷ Anyone who comes to me must be willing to share my cross and experience it as his own, or he cannot be considered to be my disciple."

Not only must we be willing to choose Jesus over every other relationship in our lives, we must also choose Him above our own life. Maybe instead of a better marriage or a happy family, your destination is a dream. Maybe you're after financial success or a certain lifestyle. We all have hopes and aspirations that propel us down the path of life. Jesus is asking if we're willing to place all of our hopes, dreams, aspirations, even our very lives aside in order to follow Him to the end. The book of Proverbs offers us great wisdom when it comes to navigating through this life.

"Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own,"
(Proverbs 3:5 MSG).

Next week, Pastor Glenn is going to introduce us to our spiritual navigational tools. You're not going to want to miss it. But how many of us have tried to figure out everything on our own? Oh yea. Can we be honest? The reason we try to figure out everything on our own is because we don't trust God from the bottom of our heart. The problem with trying to figure out everything on our own is that we have the perspective of a car driving behind a semi-trailer going down the highway. We can only see what's directly in front of us. We don't see the bigger picture. But God has a heavenly perspective. He's like a pilot flying overhead. He sees us, the semi-trailer, and 10 miles down the road. We have the perspective of the created not the Creator. So instead of leaning on our own finite understanding, why not trust in the One who sees the bigger picture? The verse goes on to say,

"Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track," (Proverbs 3:6 MSG).

Not only does God see the bigger picture, but He'll tell you exactly where to go if you listen for His voice in everything you do and trust Him from the bottom of your heart.

THE WAY



5. How have you seen Proverbs 3:5-6 in your own life?

Jesus leaves us with a practical picture from everyday life about how we should approach following Him.

"²⁸ So don't follow me without considering what it will cost you. For who would construct a house before first sitting down to estimate the cost to complete it?²⁹ Otherwise he may lay the foundation and not be able to finish. The neighbors will ridicule him, saying,³⁰ 'Look at him! He started to build but couldn't complete it!'" (Luke 14:25-30 TPT).

As we prepare to follow Jesus along The Way, He is asking each and everyone one of us to consider the cost of following Him. There will be times in our walk where we will have to cross a difficult bridge or take the difficult road. But something I once heard and never forgot is that when you go the devil's way, you get the rewards upfront but you spend eternity reaping the cost. When you go the Jesus Way, you get the cost upfront but you spend eternity reaping the reward. The devil will promise you temporary pleasures, success, and riches but his way always ends in misery, regret, and broken promises. His pleasure is fleeting. Today, Jesus is showing us the cost of following Him but the reward will be everlasting. Later in our series, Pastor Theresa will teach us about the rewarded life we discover when we go Jesus' Way. But today I pray you would invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and prepare you to follow The Way.

6. Do you believe the reward of following Jesus is worth the cost? Explain.