

The Call to Follow

by David Guzik

The call to follow Jesus is a call to deny self, take up the cross, and put him first in our lives, it is a call to obedience, transformation, devotion, diligence, and self-control.

Duration: 30:21

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the urgency and importance of following Jesus Christ without delay. He uses three examples from the Bible to illustrate this point. The first example is of a man who wants to bury his father before following Jesus, but Jesus tells him to let the dead bury their own dead and to come and follow Him. The second example is of a man who wants to say goodbye to his family before following Jesus, but Jesus tells him that anyone who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God. The preacher also mentions that the call of God is a topic too big to cover in one sermon, and he plans to continue discussing it in future sermons. He concludes by urging the congregation to recognize and fulfill their calling to follow Jesus without reservation.

Transcript

God's put it on our hearts to do a topical series for the next few weeks on the call of God and We're in the second part of that. We're calling it God's call my answer We we've been making our way through the book of Romans on Sunday morning, and we're in chapters 8 9 and 10 and Those chapters are rich with the call of God. I Feel it's so important for us to consider the call of God and what it means to us personally in our lives And we realize that the call of God is probably a topic that's just too big for us to take about take up on one Sunday and So this morning we're going to talk about the call to follow Last week we took a look at the call to faith Next week, it'll be the call to faithfulness and then we'll wrap it up with a look at the call to fruitfulness Last week when we spoke about the call to faith We spoke about how Jesus calls us to come and believe in him to trust in him It's a very simple idea, isn't it as we saw in the book of Revelation last week chapter 22 All who would drink of the water of life could come freely and drink If you want to come to Jesus you can come and he calls all of us to this faith But we need to understand that that's Not where it ends The call of God goes much further in our life than just the call to faith So this morning we want to consider the call to follow from Mark chapter 8 verse 34 Are you there with me? Let me read it When he had called the people to himself with his disciples also he said to them Whoever desires to come after me Let him deny himself and take up his cross and Follow me We find this first of all Jesus offering an invitation.

He's saying you can follow him Just as much as we saw very clearly last week that Jesus calls us to faith He's also speaking to you this morning and he's calling you to follow To follow in his footsteps to follow him. He's your Lord. He's your master.

So you follow him Now when we think about that for a moment we think what a great deal who would refuse it First of all the call to faith. I Mean he saves my soul from hell if you were to take an opinion survey How many people want to go to hell you'd get no more than a few joking answers that would say yes You know the kind of guys who say well I'll I'll be water skiing on the lake of fire with my buddies or something like that It's very sad to think that people actually think that So when you think about being rescued from hell how great that is who wouldn't sign on for that and then you think Jesus himself Invites me to a special relationship with him and invites me to follow him. I can be a follower of Jesus You may have mentors or you know gurus so to speak in your life maybe in the investment world You have a particular guy you like his investment advice and you really try to follow it And then there's this other fellow here in the business world You really like what he says about management or leadership and you really try to follow that Well, this is Jesus himself saying it come I'll be your mentor.

You can follow me Who wouldn't sign up for that? Well, lots of people wouldn't when they see what it entails It's right here in the verse in front of us Mark chapter 8 verse 34 Whoever desires to come after me First let him deny himself Second let him take up his cross and follow me. Actually the two described the same kind of thing Denying yourself and taking up your cross are really the same thing in the way Jesus means it here You see everybody knew what Jesus meant when he described taking up your cross He wasn't talking about a piece of jewelry he wasn't talking about a decoration on a wall in the ancient world crosses meant one thing it meant execution an execution in the most horrifying Humiliating way possible and Jesus is inviting every one of us to take up our cross Isn't that strange? Deny yourself take up your cross Cross wasn't about religious ceremonies. It wasn't about tradition It wasn't about spiritual feelings.

The cross was a way to execute people How would you like it if Jesus came and said to you today walk down death road daily and follow me You see taking up your cross. It wasn't a journey. It was a one-way trip.

No return ticketing You went one way to the cross. It's not talking about some kind of irritation in life They say well this this is my cross to bear No, you your cross to bear is dying to yourself. Just like me just like every one of us The cross isn't about self-promotion or self-affirmation The person who carried a cross knew one thing very well that they could not save themselves That they were doomed and they needed a Savior Well, Jesus says if you're going to be my follower this this is what it means this is what it takes Now the thing we need to really grab a hold of this morning is That no one is called to faith Without also being called to follow Please grab a hold of that my friends Because you may have had that mistaken notion in your mind That somehow God calls you to faith in him and you want to have faith in God you want to trust in God you want your soul saved who doesn't But somehow you thought that following Jesus was just kind of one of these optional things Let me make it very clear to you just as clearly as the call to faith goes out to you So does the call to follow and the call to faith and the call to follow are basically the same for everybody Next week when we start talking about the call to faithfulness That might work itself out very differently in individual lives and the call to fruitfulness Well, that's according to giftedness and the talents that God has given each person, but the call to faith The call to follow that's basically the same for everybody You have a Christian life to live just like I do I Need to read my Bible and fellowship with God every day.

So do you I? Need to deny myself and put others first and so do you You see we're not talking about your special unique assignment, but God calls you to it Nonetheless what we're talking about today is a call for every Christian. Sometimes we want to jump beyond the Common things to all of us into what's just individual or particular for ourselves. The car says no you come back to this first.

I The call to fruitfulness unless you first answer the call to faith and first answer the call to follow now we can think of answering the call to follow in two ways first Follow means to walk along the same path. And so that's obedience If you walk along you're following you're being you're following his pattern Secondly following means staying close to the one you follow so it means devotion Let's look at the first one first from first Peter chapter 1 verse 15 So please turn there in your Bibles and again, we're talking about the idea that follow means walking along in the same path So it means obedience Brothers shared with me after the first service a very suggestive thought about walking along in the same path He said how he's been reading in the newspaper about in Afghanistan that the country right there is covered with mines right now And in many places where the ground is thick with mines The only way that they can make an effective way to cross that piece of land is first They have to send forth somebody who will very carefully very steadily go forward and just carefully Make sure that there's a path cleared for you to travel through that piece of ground and they mark it and mark with tape and they Establish a path and they clear all the mines from that one path and if you stay on that path, you're safe You go walking around off of that path and well, you're taking your life into your own hands You might not step on a mine, but maybe you will Well, we're called to follow in the same footsteps as our Savior. Look at it here in first Peter chapter 1 verse 15 But as he who called you is holy You also be holy and all your conduct Because it is written be holy for I am holy Now there's a calling there in verse 15, isn't there the calling is from a holy God and Since the God who calls us is holy So he calls us to holy conduct.

It's not that complicated. Is it? This really isn't difficult to understand. It's hard to live But it's not hard to understand The God who calls us the God who wants us to be fashioned into his own image is a holy God and So he says this is part of the calling that I've given you.

I'm a holy God calling you You need to be holy in your conduct Now there's a problem with that is that we're not born with an instinct for holiness, are we? We're born with an instinct to sin Parents do you have to spend more time teaching your children how to be good or how to be bad? You've probably never had a single training session in your life on teaching them how to be bad Of course, they pick it up from just watching you but it's also It's also in them from birth, isn't it? It's hard work to train somebody to be good it isn't born in us to be holy and So for us to give to this place, we will answer this call to be holy. It takes a transformation in our life Let me show it to you from another passage first Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 7 First Thessalonians 4 7 again. It's very clear.

There's really not much to explain about a plain verse like this First Thessalonians 4 7 you'll find it to the left of 1st Peter chapter 1 Paul writes in 1st Thessalonians 4 7 for God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness In other words to walk after him in his character You could even go back to verse 3 of the same chapter where it says for this is the will of God Your sanctification that you should abstain from sexual immorality The predominant thought in Paul's mind in 1st Thessalonians 4 is Christians staying away from sexual immorality But it's much broader thought than out God hasn't called us to be unclean He's called us to walk clean after him and have our conduct pure and this means we're called to transformation I'll put it to you plainly God calls us to transformation to live as his people not like everyone else. This is the call of God for your life if your life looks just like the life of Other people who aren't followers of Jesus the only difference being you attend church, and they don't You haven't been transformed This transformation isn't

working in your life. It's not evident in your life that you're a follower of Jesus Christ That there needs to be some evident difference some transformation Because the way that we're born the way we're given to be by natural inclination isn't good enough Answering the call to follow this idea of obedience means that we're going to be transformed And we don't primarily transform ourselves.

We ask God we say to God you transform me and help me to walk in that transformation so answering the call to follow Means to walk along the same path of Jesus and so it means obedience, but it also means something else It means following close in devotion to Jesus Christ again, when we think of following what we think of staying close and If you stay close to Jesus, it means that you will be devoted to him Now that's a question for you to ask yourself it's a great question for the first Sunday of a new year, isn't it? Are you devoted to Jesus Christ or is it kind of like you bought a fire insurance policy from him and You're not probably devoted to your insurance agent You don't have a personal relationship with him per se. He's there to provide a service for you And once that service is provided. Well, then you move on to something else But Jesus no, I wanted to be far more than that.

I Want relationship with you now For a beautiful example of what this means and how it works out in our lives. Let's turn to Luke chapter 9 verse 57 in Luke 9 57 Jesus dealt with people who wanted to follow him and He told them what it would require So we begin here the gospel of Luke chapter 9 verse 57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to him Lord I'll follow you wherever you go Now most of us if we were in Jesus's sandals at this position we just said great come on along Jesus isn't like that We almost think Jesus is crazy for saying what he's going to say to this man in verse 58 And Jesus said to him Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head Just say what he means by that He's saying to the man You know following me is no picnic. I Don't have it so nice in this life.

I Don't have a lot of the material things that other people have and rely on Even the animals have their homes, but I don't You want to follow me? You want to follow somebody who doesn't have such a nice easy life See what Jesus is telling the man here is that following him will cost something and he's warning him about the cost Well, I'm a shudder to Jesus. What are you doing? Give him the sign on the dotted line. Tell him at the cost later much much later And I fear sometimes that sometimes people come to Jesus under false pretenses almost They come to Jesus under a false promise that Jesus is just kind of something that you add to your life Your life stays basically the way it is It's just now that Jesus is added to it and somehow Jesus makes everything better in your life And then you you don't have to go to hell either That's not what it's like Jesus following me will cost you something It's going to require things of you that maybe you didn't know you could give But it will cost you something Look at the next man.

It's in verse 59 Then he said to another follow me But he said Lord, let me first go and bury my father Jesus said to him let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God Don't think that the man's father was a dead corpse laying out in the living room floor Please just give me permission to dig a hole and put my father in it. No, his father was still alive It's a common figure of speech from the ancient world. What it means is that the man wanted to wait until his father died Jesus I have family obligations Let me wait until those family obligations are fulfilled when my father dies, of course Then we'll bury him and then I'll be free to follow you Jesus said let the dead bury their own dead you go preach the kingdom of God You see the man was caught here in a classic struggle Between good and the best was it a good thing for him to be devoted to his father and take care of those family obligations? Absolutely.

It was a good thing Was it a better thing to put Jesus Christ and following him first? Yes, it was You know, sometimes we give up the best thing and that's following Jesus Christ for things that are good Don't let something good be an idol before you You see Jesus showed him in this That following Jesus can't be delayed You can't delay it. The man said well, let's just wait. What's the urgency? We'll give it a little more time I'll come back later some indefinite time.

There's a no. No, no, it can't be delayed If you want to be my follower you come now You come right now when I call you Here's the call you follow it now in verse 61 Jesus deals with the third man and Another also said Lord. I will follow you But let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house But Jesus said to him no one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God Well, Lord, I'll follow you.

But but I've got some things to take care of. I need to say my goodbyes Jesus says no, nothing can get in your way nothing You must follow me without looking back. I love the figure that Jesus uses putting the hand to the plow You can picture it in your mind.

Can't you a farmer? 2,000 years ago pulling a wooden plow behind a team of oxen and there he is. And how do you keep the roads straight? Your oxen don't necessarily walk in a straight line. That's his job to keep him going.

How do you keep it all straight and in perspective? Well, they would do it very easily Is the farmer would keep his eye on a landmark right in front of him and as he kept his eye on that landmark He would keep focused on it and as he kept that the oxen would remain focused on he could steer him in the right direction and the Furrows from the plowing would remain fairly straight If he didn't keep his his hand his eye on the thing in front of him starts looking around around behind him pretty soon It looks like you know a mishmash in the plowing field Well, that's no good. You can't effectively farm that way And Jesus says no you put your hand to the plow. You don't look back You stay focused on what's right ahead the friends.

This tells us that following Jesus requires diligence There's no other way to describe it It's not always easy. It will require diligence. It'll cost you something.

There's an urgency about this Do you see what this passage from the gospel of Luke is telling us about following Jesus and we need to touch on one other important aspect of following Jesus one that trips up many many people and for that I need you to turn to the gospel of John chapter 21 Again from this passage in Luke. We saw that following Jesus will cost us something We find out that it can't be delayed and that following Jesus also requires diligence There's something else that is required of us if we'll follow Jesus and again, it's found in John chapter 21 verse 15 I need to exercise it an enormous amount of self-control here because this is one of my favorite passages of the Bible and I'd Just like to sort of ramble on for about another half hour 45 minutes on this because it's it's a great passage But we need to focus on what Jesus says to Peter Later on in this section beginning at verse 15. So when they had eaten breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter Simon Son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? He said him yes Lord, you know that I love you he said to him feed my lambs Said to him again a second time Simon son of Jonah.

Do you love me? He said to him? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him tend my sheep He said to him the third time Simon son of Jonah. Do you love me? Peter was grieved Because he said to him the third time Do you love me? He said to him Lord, you know all things you know that I love you Jesus said to him feed my sheep This passage is often called the restoration of Peter and fittingly so There's a

sense in which each one of the disciples denied Jesus, but Peter denied him in a unique way Peter denied him three times and Denied him vocally and Peter claimed to have a superior love than all the other disciples You know if all others forsake you I never will Well, Peter was found to be wanting on each one of those aspects.

He came up short And now Jesus is restoring him in front of all the disciples Yeah, I got to watch myself because I'll go on and on what we really want to look at look at verse 18 Most assuredly I say to you when you were younger you girded yourself and walked where you wished But when you're old you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish This he spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God friends. Can you picture this on the shores of the Sea of Galilee? It's morning time. Jesus had prepared breakfast through the disciples.

He takes Peter aside Close enough to where the other disciples can hear what's going on but but but far enough to where it's clear that Jesus is speaking individually to Peter and He goes through this dialogue about do you love me? And you know, I love you Lord and and at the end of it Jesus says Simon, you know you used to do your own thing when you were a younger man But when you're older, they're gonna stretch out your arms and Jesus said it in almost a poetic way But they're gonna nail you to a cross Simon. Can you imagine the shudder that ran up Peter's spine? Sometimes we wish we knew what the Lord had in store for us. Oftentimes.

It's good if we don't And notice this again verse 19 this he spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God and when he had spoken this he said to Him follow me You know how much it'll cost Peter, you know what it'll require of you you follow me nonetheless And you know what Peter would say he would say yes, I will follow you I will follow you Jesus But but what's going to get in the way of Peter right now is what gets in our way so many times I'm going to write here verse verse 20 then Peter Turning around saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following who had also leaned on his breast at the supper and said Lord Who's the one who betrayed you? That's John who's writing this John doesn't want to refer to himself He's too polite. So he describes it roundabout way verse 21 Peter seeing him said to Jesus, but but Lord, what about this man? Isn't that where our following of Jesus gets so messed up oftentimes We set our eyes on others instead of on Jesus Oh Lord, what about them? You know, what are you going to do with them? How are you gonna work in their life? When are you gonna have it happen for them? Or what about this? What about that? You get the point, don't you? Just what I'll follow you Jesus, but I just want to know that it's fair compared to other people Look what Jesus says to him verse 22 Jesus said to him if I will that he remains till I come what is that to you you follow me? So does God seem to be far more generous with someone else than he is with you? What is that to you? You follow Jesus? Does someone else seem to be smarting under the chastising hand of God and it confuses you you don't know what's going on and it Makes you wonder where's God? What is that to you? You follow God? You're worried about what other people say or think or do or any the rest of it What is that to you you follow him friends? The point is very plain following Jesus means focusing on Jesus not on others You focus on others. You'll miss that key of following Jesus now How can you live this out very practically you want to follow Jesus you want to be devoted unto him.

I Know that in large measure it means cultivating and investing in your personal relationship with him You see for many of you following Jesus better following or fulfilling I should say the call to follow means Investing more in your Christian life than you have been investing You understand about investment, don't you if you don't invest much you won't see much growth in the investment Let's say you have a mutual fund and you've decided I'm going to invest a dollar a month in that mutual fund and you do It for five years

and at the end of that five years you take a look at the final figure boy This seems low.

How come I don't see that much money in here Because you never invested much in it's the same principle. How practically are you going to invest in following Jesus? What am I willing to invest to follow Jesus Christ? We all know it's going to cost something Now it may be that God will speak to you about something new today But I suppose for a lot of you he's already spoken to your heart about something and you need to rededicate yourself to it See what it means It will cost you something to make daily time with God a true priority For you to see it as the most important thing in your life that's going to cost you something But that's what Jesus said it would be to be a follower of his It will cost you something to get involved with a group of people Who can share what's really going on in their Christian lives a place where you can be helped and where you can help that's going to Cost you something no doubt about it You may have to give up something else to be a part of that But you need to invest more than you are it would cost you something to realize that Sunday morning isn't enough That if your Christian life pretty much takes place within these walls, it's not enough You need to do something else very regular very committed in your walk with God It's going to cost you something to honor God with your resources the way that you should It would cost you something to put your pride on the line and actually be bold enough to talk to people about Jesus But you know here's the great thing You can't make a better investment Than giving things up for Jesus than paying a cost for him Because when you just put money out well it just goes But when you give up something for Jesus when you pay a cost for following him you're investing And Jesus pays the best returns of all You will never ever be left short with what you have invested in Jesus Christ Friends do you hear God's call going out to you today?

It's not just a call to faith Jesus says I want you to follow You can see him beckoning with his hands which you follow me What is that to you about everything else you follow me? I have a place for you to go a destination to bring you It begins with building that relationship founded on both obedience and devotion close devotion to Jesus Christ This can be the year when you followed Jesus more closely than you ever have Let's pray and ask God to make it that way for us father That's my prayer this morning for us all Lord God, I know that what we've seen and heard this morning for most every one of us.

It's nothing new Lord just like Peter said we constantly need to be reminded of these things If we're not reminded Lord, we'll forget the urgency and the importance of simply following Jesus And Lord help us to recognize this as our calling This is what you have called us to God It really is our destiny and we can try to fight against it, but we'll only have peace We'll only have real fruitfulness in our life When we fulfill this call to follow So Lord without reservation. We say you lead and we follow and I pray God that you would speak to each individual heart and Show them how they can make that real in their life in Jesus name Amen

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