

# Conference for Missionaries-1988- Discipleship - Part 4

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald explores the challenges and rewards of true discipleship in following Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 42:43

**Scripture:** Jonah 3:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:4-8, Luke 9:57-62

**Topics:** "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses three encounters with Jesus and the lessons we can learn from them. The first encounter is with a man who eagerly declares his willingness to follow Jesus wherever he goes. The preacher suggests that this encounter is not directed at the disciples, but rather serves as a reminder that many will aspire to follow Jesus, but few will actually attain it. The second encounter is with a man who wants to first bid farewell to his family before following Jesus. Jesus responds by emphasizing the importance of wholehearted commitment and not looking back. The preacher highlights the disciples' ongoing learning through these encounters as they are sent out on a missionary journey. The sermon concludes by discussing the cost of discipleship and the challenges that may arise in following Jesus.

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## Transcript

Reminded us that young people do have a tendency to forget, and it's true. A young man came to the place in life where he had to put his mother into a retirement home, and after she was there a week, he went and visited her, and he wanted to make sure that she was still quite mentally alert, and he said to her, what is my name? She said, you just sit down and think a while, and it'll come to you. I'd like to echo what Brother Sam said, expressing thanks for all who have made this conference what it has been.

Of course, he didn't mention CMML, and we'd like to add the brothers and sisters of CMML to that list, wouldn't we? And we wouldn't want the conference to end without expressing our deep thanks, and also the fact that we have come to love you all very, very much, and it's hard leaving. We're going to turn again tonight to Luke chapter 9, and read that last paragraph or so, the cost of discipleship, beginning in verse 57. 57, through the end of the chapter.

Now, it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to him, Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. And Jesus said to him, foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. 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. 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. We've been trying to see how the various paragraphs in this chapter fitted together. The Lord has sent the disciples out on a missionary journey, and they're still learning by the incidents that occur.

And what would they learn from this? First of all, I don't think this is directed at the disciples. They had already answered the call of God, hadn't they? They had already forsaken all to follow the Lord Jesus. It seems to me what the Lord is saying to them in this incident is, don't forget, when you go and preach the kingdom, and serve me, there's going to be a considerable fallout.

Many will aspire, but few will attain. And it's really good that the Lord laid that foundation. We could become very discouraged if we didn't know that, if we didn't have the parable of the four soils in Matthew chapter 13.

Four different kinds of soil, and only one soil bore fruit. And we see that in life, don't we, as we evangelize, as we see people professing faith in Christ. But the highway is littered with carcasses along the way.

Those who have started well, it seems, but didn't finish. And so, here you have three men coming to a face-to-face encounter with the Lord Jesus, and look at the results. Someone has called them Mr. Too Quick, Mr. Too Slow, and Mr. Too Easy.

The first one, on his own, said, Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. He pictures to us shallow emotionalism. Shallow emotionalism.

I will follow you wherever you go, Jesus said. Really? Are you willing to be homeless? Do you know what the cost may involve? Foxes have and birds of the air have nest, but the son of man has not where to lay his head. That's the last you ever hear of that fellow.

In the second case, the Lord Jesus called him to follow. Follow me, he said, Lord, first let me go and bury my father. Jesus said, let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

Now, there's a question as to whether the man's father had died, or whether he wanted to go home and wait till he died. And, of course, I believe it's the second, don't you? I think he wanted to wait and go home until his father died, and see that his father got a decent burial, which in Bible land was very, very important. Notice the word, me first.

Let me first. And, of course, that really encapsulates the whole error of his position. Let me first go and bury my father.

Jesus said to him, look, there are certain things that the unsaved can do just as well as saved people. Let them do it. You be indispensable for the kingdom of God.

You do what other people can't do. Don't let your life be taken up with the trivia of this world. Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.

The third also wanted to get on the bandwagon, as it were, but he wanted first to go and bid them farewell, which are at home. I don't think that was just a quick goodbye. I think it was a ceremonial goodbye that

might last, a ritual goodbye that might last over a prolonged period of time.

And Jesus said, no man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. If the first represents shallow emotionalism, the second speaks to us of indecision, and the third of undue attachment to family ties. The first was held back by the love of comfort, wasn't he? The second by a wrong priority, and the third by tender earthly ties.

And as you know, we're called to plow a straight furrow, a straight, solitary furrow for the Lord. We put our hand to the plow, and Jesus said, as far as service in the realm is concerned, no man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom. I think that means fit for service in the kingdom.

No wonder the poet said, keep me from turning back. The handles of my plow with tears are wet, the shears with rust are spoiled, and yet, and yet, my God, my God, keep me from turning back. So that's the word of the Lord to us tonight.

Go on, go on. There's all eternity to rest in, and far too few are on the active service list. No labor for the Lord is risky to invest in, and nothing will make up should his well-done zealot.

We don't know what happened to these three men. They fade into oblivion, but I can tell you something about them. They never found a better Christ to follow.

But I believe the call of Christ comes to every man, every woman, every boy, every girl, and they don't have to respond. The human will is involved there, but if they say no, they'll never find a better Christ to follow. Now, I'd like to think with you tonight about the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus is our master and our service for him.

There's no master like the Lord Jesus. No one in all the universe quite like him, and no servant is more privileged than the one who serves the Lord Christ, the highest of honors. No service is more noble, no service is more rewarding, no service is more glorious, and yet there are thousands of Christian homes where children are raised under the sound of the word of God, and yet where the work of God is never held before them as a desirable way to spend their lives.

They're taught to make a name for themselves in the community, to be somebody great in the world, but I say again, the work of the Lord is not held before them as a desirable way in which to spend their lives. Let us think tonight of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, what our master has done for us. He didn't cross an ocean as some of you have done.

He crossed a universe to come to where we were. He held the highest place above, adored by all the sons of flame, yet such his self-denying love he laid aside his crown and came to seek the law. At the cost of heavenly rank and earthly fame, he sought me, blessed be his name.

He was the prototype of all true missionaries, wasn't he? The blessed Lord Jesus. He turned his back on all the glories of heaven, the privileges, the palace, the pleasure, and the position. He emptied himself.

He didn't empty himself of his person. You can't empty yourself of your person. He emptied himself of his position in heaven.

That's the only sense in which he did empty himself. He came to us, and who were we? We were a race of heathens. We were a race of pagans.

We were a race of infidels, rebels, and enemies. Let us never forget that as we work in third world countries, that we too were part of the mission tale. Easy to become consumed with conceit and think that we are the people and wisdom will die with us, but he came to where we were, lost in sin and degradation to seek and to save us.

He was born in a barn. He never slept on a mattress, never had hot and cold water, running water, never had refrigeration, never had air conditioning, never had the comforts which we take for granted in our society today. He endured insults, hostility, physical and verbal abuse, and rejection.

He knew what sorrow was. The man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and finally he died on a cross of shame to redeem us. He purchased us with his own precious blood.

We have been purchased. We belong to him by purchase. That means if we take our lives and do with them what we want to do with them, we're thieves because we take we're taking something that doesn't belong to us.

We are his body, soul, and spirit. Just think of it. To make us his bond servants, he gave his life.

And now we are his servants, but what do we have to offer him? We're just ordinary people, not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. God has chosen the foolish things of this world, the weak, the base, the things that are not, in a very real sense we're God's five-ranked army of fools. What a resume! And he's willing to take us and to use us.

What has made the difference but because he's given us a vision? As the poet has said, I've seen a vision, and for self I cannot live. Life is worse than worthless unless all I give. When we stand before Calvary and see him dying there for us, what can we say but, O Christ, thy bleeding hands and feet, thy sacrifice for me, each wound, each tear, demands my life, a sacrifice for thee.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. What he said was right, wasn't he? When he said, if Jesus Christ be God and die for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

I'm impressed every time I go to David Livingston's home in Scotland and see that dedication. On one side of the plaque it says, the love of Christ constrains me, and Paul, the love of Christ compels me, David Livingston. Vowing at his feet, Christ's feet, all we can say is thou hast bled and died for me, henceforth I will live for thee.

Let's think for a minute about the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, he prepares the service for us ahead of time, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath aforeordained that we should walk in them. The work has already been planned, the blueprint has already been prepared, and our responsibility is to be so in touch with the Lord that we can discern the blueprint and walk on in obedience to his will.

But he does more than that, he does more than the blueprint, he puts the will in us to do it. I think that's beautiful. It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do.

It is God who worketh in you, both to will, and what that really means to me is that, okay, here's the will of God, and I'm obedient to the will. I want to do his will. What does he do? He comes and he takes control of my intellect, and my emotions, and my will, and he molds them, and he forms them so that I really want to

do the things that he wants me to do.

God doesn't drag reluctant people into his service, does he? He takes people who are volunteers, and he works on them. I say again, he works on their intellect, and their emotions, and their will, so that when he finally reveals his will, he says, Praise the Lord, that's exactly what I wanted, although that might not have been true two months before, and certainly wasn't true before we were saved. But he not only works in us to will, he works in us to do.

He not only creates the will in us to do it, but he gives us the power to do it, the strength to do it. He works in us to do for his good pleasure. By the Spirit of God, we are able to do the, to think the unthinkable, to dare the incredible, and to do the impossible.

And he doesn't stop there. Wonder of wonders, in his service, he supplies everything that's needed to carry on the service. There never was a master like the Lord Jesus.

He provides for whatever he orders. God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work. Remarkable, isn't it? That verse says to me that God's work will never lack God's supply.

God is able to make all grace abound to you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work. And then, in spite of the fact that it's all of him, he rewards us for doing it. That's wonderful, isn't it? He makes the blueprint, creates the will in us to do it, gives us the ability to do it, supplies the need for everything that we might need in doing it, and then we do it, he rewards us.

And it's all of him. We look back and we say, could God be the glory? It certainly wasn't us, it was God. You know, how different he is from the average employer.

His service is perfect freedom. We don't come to Friday and say, thank God it's Friday. That's what the world says.

Chain of restaurants, I saw one in Grand Rapids, that's the name of the restaurant. Thank God it's Friday. I never said that.

Friday comes, I'm looking forward to the Lord's Day. There's always something good to be looking forward to. And, you know, there's something else wonderful about the Lord Jesus that isn't true of other employers.

He doesn't give up on when we fail. That's a good thing he doesn't. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time.

Am I ever glad that verse is in the Bible? As far as salvation is concerned, there's no second chance. You die without Christ, your faith is sealed. But I tell you, as far as service is concerned, there is a second chance.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, and just because a person has failed doesn't mean that God is through with him. Now, that isn't true in the world. Some time ago, the USS Enterprise, the aircraft carrier, returned to Alameda, right near us, from nine months in the western Pacific.

Before they come under the golden gate, I think it's before they come under the golden gate, a civilian pilot goes on board to guide the ship through into the dock. As they were within, I think, two thousand feet of

the pier, the ship went onto a sandbar. Now, that captain was a great captain, and much loved by the men, but his career was finished.

They shunted him off to a training facility somewhere. He would never become a Rear Admiral. One mistake, and that man had given his life for the Navy.

I mean, he had worked his way up through the ranks, he was now a captain, and the greatly-to-be-desired next step was Rear Admiral. Never get it. A big one mistake.

The British Navy was on maneuvers once, and they were performing a rather intricate turn, and the captain of one of the ships kind of goofed, and he nearly collided with one of the other ships, and the Admiral saw it, and he radioed to the captain, and he said, Captain, what are your intentions? The captain radioed back, Sir, I intend to buy a farm. It was through. His career was finished.

I'm glad we don't have a master like that. Secular employers pay according to justice sometimes. The Lord Jesus pays according to grace, and grace is better than justice.

I think this is vividly brought out for us in Matthew 20 verses 1 through 16, the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The master there acted according to the workers' needs, not according to human greed. I'm so glad I work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

He acted according to favor, not merit. It reminds us of what Mark Twain said. He said, Heaven goes by favor, not by merit.

If it went by merit, you would stay out, and your dog would go in. Something to think about, isn't it? Mark Twain was no believer, but many a truth has been spoken between false sheep. Our master gives us a tremendous sense of fulfillment in our service for him.

He saves us from spending our lives on trivia. I'm so glad that the passion in my life isn't studying sediments in Chesapeake Bay, aren't you? Or the mating habits of Wyoming antelopes? Or the bacteriological content of cotton t-shirts? I'm glad. I'll tell you, I'm thankful to the Lord day by day that we're able to give men the answers to their questions.

We are. I find a tremendous sense of fulfillment. The question of origin comes along.

We have the answer here in the Word of God. The question of providence comes along. You know, why? Why disease, poverty, oppression, crop failures, hurricanes, barrenness, drought, mental illness, death? Why all of these? It's right here in the Word.

We can sit down and talk with people and give them the satisfactory answer from the Word of God. Questions concerning sin and salvation and future events. Wonderful, isn't it? A sense of fulfillment in a work like that.

And our master provides perfect security. Perfect security. My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. All needed food and clothing. I'll tell you, no one leads such a worry-free life as the one who serves Jesus Christ with a passion.

Isn't that right? No one leads such a worry-free life. And beyond that, we know that we are immortal till our work is done. In the medical workshop today, we're talking about AIDS.

And we all developed, in a sense, a deep neurosis. But we're going to be here till our work is done. And when it's done, he'll call us home, or he'll come himself and take us home.

I like to remember that unlike earthly employers, hmm, the Lord doesn't give us the golden handshake when we've exhausted our strength, when we've exhausted our potential, when we're burned out and we're spent. He's a great master. Does this mean that we don't have problems and trials and difficulties along the way? No, of course it doesn't mean that.

He never promised that. But it does mean that there's a balm in Gilead. There's a beauty for ashes.

And no matter what the circumstance may be that we go through in life and in our service for him, there's encouragement and consolation. I'm sure that some of you at times face loneliness. Well, does the Lord Jesus have a loneliness? Yes.

What a privilege, what a privilege to share that experience that the Lord Jesus had as a man here on earth. In Mark chapter 10 and verse 32, we read that as they were on the road going to Jerusalem, Jesus was out ahead of them. Just think of that.

They're going, he's going to the cross. You'd think his legs, humanly speaking, would be leaden. They weren't.

He was out ahead of the disciples. I want to tell you, it was lonely at the whole there. You know why? Because he had outstripped his fellows in zeal for God.

They couldn't hold a candle to him. Do we know something about sorrow in our service? Yes. But he was a man of sorrows, as we've already reminded ourselves.

And he comes to us and he says, well, we things may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Tremendous persecutions come to us. What do we do? We hear him say, you have not yet resisted unto blood.

To resist unto blood in that context means to die for the cause of Christ. No matter what we're called to go through in the way of persecution, we can still hear him say that to us. You have not yet resisted unto blood.

And the implication is, I did. You haven't followed me all the way yet. We're hurt when we're rejected, aren't we? But we can always hear him tell us that it's he, he's the one who is being rejected, not us.

We're there as his representative. I'm sure on the mission field you often come across selfishness, but it's wonderful to be able to find in the selfishness of others an opportunity to identify ourselves afresh with the Lord as the servant of all. Sometimes we're tempted in the Christian life and in service for the Lord to find fault with our fellow workers.

And what does he say to us? He says, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. And he may be saying that to some of us here at the conference. In fact, there may be somebody here at the conference who really rubs you the wrong way, and yet in his own way, in her own way, doing the work for God.

What is that to thee? Follow thou me. No matter how severe the pressure that we're called to go through in the service of the Lord, we can know that God is faithful, who will not allow us to be tempted above what we're able, and will with the temptation provide a way of escape that we might be able to bear it. Now, let's talk about the reward, and there are several aspects to this subject.

For instance, Paul says, no reward for me for preaching the gospel. I have to preach the gospel. Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel.

But I think we sense that in our own lives, don't we? There's a divine compulsion there that causes us to go forth, and we can't claim any credit for that. So Paul said, well, the only reward for me will be I'll make it without charge. He wouldn't have made a very good TV evangelist, would he? But that's what he said.

He said, my reward will be in making the gospel without charge to those who hear it. In a very real sense, the work of the Lord is its own reward. I was out in New Zealand a few years ago, and there's a Christian brother there who has, I think it's called an agrodome or something like that, and they bring sheep in, and they bring in the sheepdogs, and afterwards they take us out into sort of a ranch there, and they show us the sheepdogs at work.

And you know, he said, you don't have to reward those dogs. All you have to do is let them do the work. That's their reward.

They just love to do the work. I said, oh, that's the way I find it in the work of the Lord. You don't have to reward me for doing it.

The work is its own reward. Somebody said, so it was with Paul. He cared for only one thing, and that was to be loyal to Christ, to have his smile.

To him more than to any other man, Christ's work was wages, and Christ's smile was heaven. But there are other rewards, too. The Lord Jesus says that the reward for faithful service is more service.

That's interesting, isn't it? For faithful work is a wider scope of work. For instance, the man who gained five talents was given rulership over many things. The man who had earned ten miners was given authority over ten cities.

The reward of faithful work is more work. Maybe you're saying, I couldn't take any more. He gives the strength to do it.

Also, the Lord promised that those who forsake houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, and land for his sake would receive what? A hundredfold. And I'm telling you, if we opened this up to testimony tonight, you'd hear it. And you'd hear that that hundredfold is no exaggeration, 10,000%.

True, absolutely true. And in the coming day, what a reward it will be to approach the gates of glory and have a committee there. Paul said that would be a reward for him.

What is our joy and crown of rejoicing are not even ye, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. That, to him, would be a great reward. This reminds me of a poem by Rachel Lindsay, and it's entitled General William Booth Enters into Heaven.

I don't know if you've ever read it or not. I don't suppose Rachel Lindsay was a Christian. His theology is defective here.

He has these folks reached by the Salvation Army right at the gates of glory, and they're still slum dwellers. But once they step over, they're transformed. So please, please attribute his lack of theology to poetic license.

But the poem is good. Booth led boldly with his big bass drum. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? The saint smiled gravely, and they said, He's come.

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Walking, lepers followed rank on rank. Lurching bravos from the ditches dank, drabs from the alleyways, and drug scenes pale. Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail.

Vermin-eaten saints, with lowly breasts, unwashed legions with the ways of death. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Every slum had sent its half a score the round world over. Booth had asked for more.

Every banner that the wide world flies, bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes. Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang. Trance fanatical, they shrieked and sang.

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Hallelujah, it was queer to see. Bull-necked convicts with that land made free. Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare, blare, on, on, upward through the golden air.

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Booth died blind, and still by faith he trod. Eyes still dazzled by the ways of God. Booth led boldly, and he looked the chief.

Eagle countenance in sharp relief. Beard a flying air of high command, unabated in that holy land. This is nice.

Jesus came out from the courthouse door, stretched his hands above the passing poor. Booth saw not, but led his queer ones there, round and round the mighty courthouse square. Then in an instant all that bleary view marched on spotless, clad in raiment new.

The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled, and blind eyes opened on a new sweet world. Drabs and vixens in a flash-made whole. Gone was the weasel head, the snout, the jowl.

Sages and sybils now, and atheists clean, rulers of empires and of forests clean. And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer, he saw his master through the flag-filled air. Christ came gently with a robe and crown for Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down.

He saw King Jesus. They were face to face, and he knelt a-weeping in that holy place. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? General William Booth enters heaven.

Yes, there are rewards on earth, and there will be rewards in eternity. The crown to lay adoringly at his feet. The words from his own lips, Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord.

What shall we say to all these things? We say, He's worthy of all that I am, of all that I possess. He's the greatest of all masters. I love my master.

I will not go out free. I think Handley Mould said it very well in that beautiful hymn, My glorious victor, Prince Divine, Clasp these surrendered hands in thine. At length thy will is all my own.

Glad vassal of a Savior's throne, My master, lead me to the door. Pierce this now willing ear once more. Thy bonds are freedom.

Let me stay with thee to toil, endure, obey. Yes, ear and hands, and thought and will, use all in thy dear slavery still. Self-weary liberties I cast beneath thy feet.

There, keep them fast. Isn't that beautiful? Self-weary liberties I cast beneath thy feet. There, keep them fast.

Tread them still down, and then I know these hands shall with thy gifts overflow, and pierced in ears shall hear the tone which tells me thou and I are one. I don't know how you feel at the close of this conference, but I feel it would be tremendously fitting that I, perhaps we, should rededicate ourselves to the Lord. And I think in order to do that, I'm going to ask you, if you wish to, to stand.

You don't have to. While we pray, would you like to stand just for a prayer of rededication to the Lord Jesus? Thank you. Shall we pray? Lord Jesus, we acknowledge tonight that you are the best of all masters.

We love you for all you are, for all you have done for us. Lord Jesus, we have all committed our lives to you for salvation, for the salvation of our souls. We can never thank you enough for redemption through your blood, the forgiveness of sin.

And Lord Jesus, we have committed ourselves to you for service. We would not be here if it were not true. We could do nothing less after all you've done for us.

We have laid our lives on the altar of sacrifice. But you know, Lord, how the sacrifice often seeks to crawl off the altar. Our love has its ups and downs.

Our zeal has a way of abating. Everything seems routine, Lord. We go through the motions mechanically.

Our prayer life is often a farce rather than a force. And when the cross rises before us, there's a pathway ahead. We seek escape routes.

We seek back doors. And so we come, Lord Jesus Christ, to rededicate ourselves to you afresh tonight. We would put our ear to the door once again and say, I love my master.

I will not go out free. Revive our flagging spirits, Lord. Rekindle the fire on the altar of our hearts.

Send us forth with renewed zeal to serve you until that wonderful day when we see you face to face. From subtle love of softening things, from easy choices, weakenings. Not this way are spirits fortified.

Not this way went the crucified. From all that dims thy calvary, O Lamb of God, deliver me. Give me the love that leads the way, the faith that nothing can dismay, the hope no disappointment tire, the passion that will burn as fire.

Help me not think to be a clod. Make me thy fuel. Flame of God, we ask it in your worthy and precious name.

Amen. You may be seated.

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