



God asks not just for commitment, but for our very lives.

# *The Savior’s Teachings on Discipleship during His Final Trek to Jerusalem*

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Elder D. Todd Christofferson recently testified that “our Heavenly Father is a God of high expectations.”<sup>1</sup> He then elaborated: “Sadly, much of modern Christianity does not acknowledge that God makes any real demands on those who believe in Him, seeing Him rather as a butler ‘who meets their needs when summoned’ or a therapist whose role is to help people ‘feel good about themselves.’ It is a religious outlook that ‘makes no pretense at changing lives.’ ‘By contrast,’ as one author declares, ‘the God portrayed in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures asks, not just for commitment, but for our very lives.’”<sup>2</sup>

The Gospel of Luke witnesses that our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ hold high expectations for us. While Luke’s Gospel typically is remembered for its emphasis on the Savior’s compassion,<sup>3</sup> it also reveals the demanding lifestyle that Jesus Christ both led and required of others. Luke illustrates this in his account of the Savior’s final trek to Jerusalem, which begins in Luke 9:51 and continues until Jesus arrives at the outskirts of Jerusalem in Luke 19:28.

In contrast to Mark and Matthew, who only briefly mention the Savior's departure from Galilee for the last time in mortality and his trek to the Jewish capital (see Mark 10:1; Matthew 19:1–2), Luke focuses great attention on this journey.<sup>4</sup> From the outset Luke names Jerusalem as the Savior's intended destination (see Luke 9:51), and he explicitly mentions the Holy City numerous times during the trek (see Luke 9:53; 13:22, 34; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11). While Luke frequently reminds his readers of the ultimate destination of this journey, he does not depict the Savior traveling a direct linear course to Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the focus of Luke's travel narrative is not on the geographic details of the route. Instead, Luke's narrative is guided by a deeper purpose. His account presents a journey of discipleship in which Jesus Christ marks the path by both word and deed. Many of the Savior's teachings that are unique to Luke's Gospel appear in this travel account. These teachings serve a common theme inasmuch as they underscore "the clash . . . between two fundamentally different ways" of life—God's way as set forth and demonstrated by Jesus Christ and "the normal way, the ordinary path of self-interest."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Luke provides distinctive context and content regarding the events and teachings that occurred as the Savior was traveling to the place of his ultimate sacrifice. This paper provides an analysis of the Savior's teachings on discipleship included in the first part of Luke's travel account in Luke 9–14. By examining the Savior's instruction in context of his trek to Jerusalem, we can better see how Jesus Christ reinforced his teachings on discipleship with what Elder Neal A. Maxwell called "the eloquence of his example."<sup>7</sup>

### **Luke 9: Setting the Background for the Beginning of the Travel Account**

Luke 9 relates several key events that provide important context prior to the beginning of the travel account. The chapter opens with Jesus Christ instructing the Twelve and sending them throughout Galilee to preach and heal.<sup>8</sup> After noting the return of the Twelve, Luke narrates the feeding of the five thousand. The sequence of these events likely indicates that the Twelve had stirred much interest in the gospel during their missions. Later we read in the travel account that as the Savior "went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem" (Luke 13:22), a "company" of disciples, both men and women, traveled with him (Luke 11:27). Some of these followers may have been Galilean converts of the Twelve.

Luke proceeds to record Peter's testimony of Jesus Christ and then gives us the Savior's first unveiled declaration of his approaching death and Resurrection (see Luke 9:18–22).<sup>9</sup> Next, Luke sets forth a number of Jesus' teachings on the sacrifice required of those who would follow him (see Luke 9:23–27). Luke then relates the Savior's experience on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Luke 9:28–36). Of the three Gospel writers who recorded this experience, Luke alone mentions that Moses and Elias (or Elijah) "spake of [Jesus'] decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31).<sup>10</sup> Elder James E. Talmage referred to this experience on the mount as "the beginning of the end" of Jesus Christ's mortal ministry.<sup>11</sup>

Not long after this event, "when the time was come that [Jesus] should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). These words suggest that Jesus deliberately timed the commencement of his journey in anticipation of his death, which would occur approximately four months later.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, we learn from Luke 9 that Jesus Christ had accumulated a large number of followers; that he knew of his coming death and declared it to others; that he taught that sacrifice was necessary to follow him; and that "visitants from the unseen world came to comfort and support Him," as Elder James E. Talmage explained.<sup>13</sup> These events provide valuable context for the beginning of the travel account, in which Jesus Christ resolutely sets his face "toward Jerusalem" (Luke 13:22), the "city of destiny,"<sup>14</sup> and initiates the journey that will culminate with his death.

### Three Responses to Jesus Christ's Instruction to "Follow Me"

Shortly after beginning the travel account, Luke records three consecutive episodes in which the Savior teaches about the requirements of discipleship. The word *follow* occurs in each of the episodes. First, "a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Luke 9:57). Next, the Lord "said unto another, Follow me" (Luke 9:59). Finally, a third individual remarked, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house" (Luke 9:61). It is helpful to view these episodes in context of the storyline in Luke 9. Prior to beginning the travel account, Luke records the Savior's instruction: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). It appears Luke included the three episodes as responses to this teaching. In addition, Luke prefaced the episodes with the phrase "as they

went in the way” (Luke 9:57). This detail provides context to help us understand that these episodes occurred as Jesus walked with his disciples while en route to Jerusalem.

Understanding the context of these episodes helps us see the boldness of the first man’s declaration: “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” The Savior’s response to this statement underscores the necessity of sacrifice involved in following him: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). This description of the Savior’s mortal experience suggests that “life was very inconvenient for him,” as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once observed, and “it will often be so” for those who choose to follow him.<sup>15</sup> A commentator on Luke’s Gospel similarly remarked that the Savior’s words portray discipleship “not only as the acceptance of a master’s teaching, but as the identification of oneself with the master’s way of life. . . . The disciple must walk in the footsteps of Jesus.”<sup>16</sup>

In response to the second man, who asked to bury his father before joining the Savior on his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus replied, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). An awareness of the cultural context in which this episode occurred may provide insight into the Savior’s words. Respect for parents was very important in Jewish culture, including the responsibility to provide a proper burial for them. After preparing a body for burial and placing it in a tomb, family members typically returned a year later to place the bones in a stone box called an ossuary, which remained in the tomb as a secondary burial among the remains of other deceased family members.<sup>17</sup> If the disciple in this case was speaking of a secondary burial rather than an urgent need to care for the body of his recently deceased father, then his request demonstrated a desire to prioritize a cultural tradition over a singular opportunity to walk to Jerusalem with the Son of God and be tutored by him.

Jesus’ words may have suggested the man could be at peace about letting his deceased father remain in the tomb as he obeyed the command to follow him. It is also possible that the Savior’s response could be understood to mean, “Let the [spiritually] dead bury their [physically] dead.”<sup>18</sup> In either case, the Savior’s words do not mean it is wrong to mourn the loss of a loved one or give proper respect at a funeral. Rather, they emphasize that devotion to the Lord is a disciple’s highest priority.

To the third man, who desired to return home to bid his family farewell, the Savior replied: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking

back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). President Howard W. Hunter explained how the Savior's analogy of the plowman relates to the danger of looking back once we have decided to follow Christ: "To dig a straight furrow, the plowman needs to keep his eyes on a fixed point ahead of him. That keeps him on a true course. If, however, he happens to look back to see where he has been, his chances of straying are increased. The results are crooked and irregular furrows."<sup>19</sup> The lesson for this man was simply to follow the example of the Savior, who "stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) and did not look back.

Like this man and the other two discussed above, we must realize that sacrifice is inherent in our choice to follow Jesus Christ. Although we do not have the opportunity as they did to walk with him to Jerusalem, we can show our willingness to replicate that journey in our own lives. We can choose to leave behind any possessions, habits, traditions, or even people that may prevent us from fully heeding the Savior's commandment to follow him.

### **The Road through Samaria and the Parable of the Good Samaritan**

Just prior to recording the three episodes on following the Savior, Luke informs us that Jesus and his disciples passed through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. Some of the Samaritans, recognizing Jesus and his disciples as Jews, evidently deprived them of customary elements of hospitality, such as provisions and lodging.<sup>20</sup> In response, two of the leading disciples, James and John, sought permission to call down fire from heaven to consume their offenders (see Luke 9:52–54). In this volatile setting, the Savior demonstrated patience and forbearance while admonishing his disciples to do the same (see Luke 9:55–56).

Shortly after this episode, the Savior told the parable of the good Samaritan. Typically, we study this parable in context of the Savior's response to the questions of a disingenuous lawyer (see Luke 10:25, 29). While this context is very helpful in understanding the immediate circumstances in which the Savior uttered the parable, we can also benefit from asking what the parable can teach us about discipleship—particularly as we remember that some of Jesus' closest followers had lately shown hostility toward Samaritans as they traveled with him on the way to Jerusalem.

First, we learn that there are no exceptions for the commandment to love. The unlikely protagonist of the story, a Samaritan, chose to show kindness to a Jew, whose nation despised and denigrated Samaritans. In other words, he



chose to love a person who perhaps was the most difficult person for him to love. While we can only imagine how James and John may have reacted to the parable of the good Samaritan, we do know from the book of Acts that John later “preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” and conferred the gift of the Holy Ghost upon those who were baptized (Acts 8:25; see also vv. 14–17). John also gave us the cherished account of the Savior’s interaction with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (see John 4).

The Savior’s disciples may have also recognized that not only did Jesus make a Samaritan the protagonist of the story, but he may have also made the Samaritan a symbol for himself. The charity Jesus had recently displayed toward hostile Samaritans was the same transcendent love the good Samaritan demonstrated for a Jew. Also, in the coming weeks, the Savior’s disciples would witness Jesus encountering many wounded souls on the road to Jerusalem, including an infirm woman in a synagogue (see Luke 13:10–17); a man with dropsy (see Luke 14:1–6); ten lepers, at least one of whom was a Samaritan (see Luke 17:11–19); and even that despised and diminutive chief of the publicans, Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1–10). Like the good Samaritan in the parable, who paused on a dangerous, thief-infested highway and placed the welfare of another ahead of his own, Jesus would minister to each wounded soul he encountered on the road to Jerusalem, thinking not of himself even as he drew closer to his own death.<sup>21</sup>

As he walked with his disciples, Jesus Christ reinforced the lessons of the parable of the good Samaritan with his own example. Today, we can choose to “go, and do . . . likewise” (Luke 10:37). President Spencer W. Kimball encouraged us to be aware of our opportunities to do so:

Each of us has more opportunities to do good and to be good than we ever use. These opportunities lie all around us. . . . There are many individuals waiting to be touched and loved if we care enough to improve in our performance.

We must remember that those mortals we meet in parking lots, offices, elevators, and elsewhere are that portion of mankind God has given us to love and to serve. It will do us little good to speak of the general brotherhood of mankind if we cannot regard those who are all around us as our brothers and sisters.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Savior Teaches Mary and Martha**

During his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped at the home of Martha (see Luke 10:38). Luke informs us that at some point during this visit, Martha “was cumbered about much serving” (Luke 10:40). Hospitality was very

important in Jewish society, and a woman's honor and reputation depended partly on how well she fulfilled cultural expectations regarding the role of hostess.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Martha's anxiety in performing her role as hostess, her sister Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word" (Luke 10:39).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks used the account of Martha and Mary to teach present-day disciples of Christ about priorities; he remarked: "Just because something is *good* is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives."<sup>24</sup> Continuing, Elder Oaks provided the following counsel that may be particularly applicable to many Latter-day Saint youth and young adults:

Consider how we use our time in the choices we make in viewing television, playing video games, surfing the Internet, or reading books or magazines. Of course it is good to view wholesome entertainment or to obtain interesting information. But not everything of that sort is worth the portion of our life we give to obtain it. Some things are better, and others are best. . . .

. . . We have to forgo some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families.<sup>25</sup>

Martha, who in another setting demonstrated marvelous devotion and faith in the Savior (see John 11:19–29), here complained, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me" (Luke 10:40). Elder Oaks cited a Brigham Young University devotional address by Professor Catherine Corman Parry to help Church members learn another important lesson from this episode:

The Lord acknowledges Martha's care: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things" [Luke 10:41]. Then he delivers the gentle but clear rebuke ["But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42)]. But the rebuke would not have come had Martha not prompted it. The Lord did not go into the kitchen and tell Martha to stop cooking and come listen. Apparently he was content to let her serve him however she cared to, until she judged another person's service. . . . Martha's *self-importance* . . . occasioned the Lord's rebuke, not her busyness with the meal.<sup>26</sup>

Martha's primary mistake on this occasion seems to have been her focus upon herself. Even though she was serving others, the condition of her heart diverged from the standard of selflessness the Lord expected of his disciples. Just before he began the trek to Jerusalem, the Savior taught that "whosoever



will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24). The Savior helped Martha understand that it is not enough to simply serve the Lord and our fellowman. His disciples must overcome the tendency to think first of themselves and learn to serve Heavenly Father and his children with an eye “single to [his] glory” (D&C 88:67).

### **Jesus Christ Gives the Parable of the Rich Fool and Foretells His Suffering**

Later during his journey to Jerusalem, the Savior was surrounded by “an innumerable multitude of people” (Luke 12:1). One of them requested, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” (Luke 12:13). Instead of settling this dispute over temporal goods, the Savior addressed the root of the problem while warning the crowd: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). He then gave the parable of the rich fool:

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16–21)

In the parable, one reason for God’s characterization of the rich man as a fool may have been the man’s selfishness. In the King James Version of Luke 12:17–19, the rich man uses the first person singular pronouns *I* and *my* 11 times, revealing the man’s concern with self.<sup>27</sup> Not only was he consumed by selfishness, but the man also failed to recognize the source of his riches. In no way did he acknowledge, as the Savior did, that it was “the ground” that “brought forth plentifully” (v. 16), nor did he thank the Lord for creating the earth in which his crops grew. Ultimately the man was condemned not for the wise practice of storing temporal provisions, but for failing to prepare spiritually for the future. Being “not rich toward God” (v. 21), the man was eventually deprived not only of the treasure he had temporarily accumulated

on earth, but also of “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not” (v. 33). His choices in life left him impoverished in eternity.

President Thomas S. Monson recently taught: “Do material possessions make us happy and grateful? Perhaps momentarily. However, those things which provide deep and lasting happiness and gratitude are the things which money cannot buy: our families, the gospel, good friends, our health, our abilities, the love we receive from those around us.”<sup>28</sup> One way we can apply the teachings of Jesus Christ and his prophets is to remember that “what matters most is what lasts longest,” as Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, and to prioritize our lives accordingly.<sup>29</sup>

The Savior continued the themes he addressed in the parable of the rich fool as he instructed his disciples to trust in God for their temporal needs (see Luke 12:22–34) and to prepare spiritually for the future—particularly for his Second Coming (see Luke 12:35–59). He then shifted the focus of his message from future judgments to present circumstances, saying, “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49). What does it mean that he had already kindled the fire of judgment? Evidently, Jesus was indicating that although the time of Final Judgment was yet in the future, he was already sifting the hearts of men (see “fire” imagery in Luke 3:4, 16–17; 9:54). His words were like a sword that grew sharper as his teachings on discipleship intensified (see Hebrews 4:12).

Following his statement on judgment, Jesus Christ made a personal remark that revealed not only his willingness but his eagerness to fulfill the demanding mission his Father had given him. He declared, “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). In the Greek language in which Luke recorded this statement, *baptize* means “to dip or immerse.”<sup>30</sup> Having already received the ordinance of baptism by water, the Savior here referred to another kind of baptism. Through his coming suffering, he would descend below all things (see D&C 88:6; 122:8). At Gethsemane, his body would be covered in blood and sweat (see Luke 22:44; D&C 19:18).

In direct contrast to the rich fool who hoarded the things of the world prior to his unsuspected death, Jesus purposefully marched toward his death, deliberately giving God all that he had and was—including his life and the fullest measure of his will (see Luke 22:42; Mosiah 15:7). The Savior revealed his extraordinary determination to undergo this baptism when he uttered, “And how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). The word

*straitened* was translated from a Greek word meaning “distressed” or “hard pressed.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus Christ’s statement helps us understand that his atoning sacrifice was at the forefront of his mind and that he would not be deterred from completing it. By word and deed, the Savior again taught his followers to submit to the demands of discipleship. We can choose to follow his example by making the Father’s will our greatest priority.

### **Jesus Christ Responds to the Threat of Death from Herod**

Luke provides another overt contextual reminder in Luke 13:22 as he continues to narrate the Savior’s teachings and actions: “And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.” While Jesus was making his way to the holy city, some Pharisees approached the Lord and warned him, “Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee” (Luke 13:31). Our understanding of the gravity of this threat is heightened as we remember that Herod Antipas had already beheaded John the Baptist (see Luke 9:9). Yet Jesus was unfazed by this threat of violence. He responded, “Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). The phrase “that fox” is “a term of contempt” that shows Jesus’ utter lack of fear toward men.<sup>32</sup> But the thrust of Jesus’ reply had little to do with the threat from Herod Antipas. Instead the Savior focused on his divine mission, affirming that he would continue to seize each opportunity to teach, bless, and heal others while he remained in mortality. He would spend his last days—like all his days before—serving others.

Jesus next declared, “I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33). This statement further emphasizes the Savior’s determination to continue his walk until the time for his death had come. Rather than fretting over future events, Jesus demonstrated perfect trust in the timetable Heavenly Father had set for his life. Present-day disciples of Christ—including youth and young adults grappling with important decisions regarding missions, schooling, employment, dating, and marriage—can follow the Savior’s example by applying Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s counsel: “Let us learn to say not only, ‘Thy will be done,’ but patiently also, ‘Thy timing be done.’”<sup>33</sup> By choosing to follow Jesus Christ, we can similarly live each day with confidence that Heavenly Father’s wisdom will govern the timing of events in our lives.

## Jesus Christ Teaches While Dining at the House of a Pharisee

On the way to Jerusalem, the Savior accepted an invitation to dine on the Sabbath at “the house of one of the chief Pharisees” (Luke 14:1). While there, he noticed that the other guests “chose out the chief rooms” (Luke 14:7), or places of honor. According to custom, the most honored guests were seated closest to the head of the table. The Savior utilized this setting to teach “a parable” (Luke 14:7) that conveyed an eternal principle about the relationship between humility and exaltation:

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 14:8–11)

This parable illustrates the idea that “real honor will come not from one’s self-seeking choices, but from what is bestowed on one by another.”<sup>34</sup> The setting in which Jesus Christ taught this truth powerfully reinforced its message. As we remember that Jesus was in the home of one of the chief Pharisees and that his parable was a thinly veiled rebuke of the petty actions of the Pharisee’s distinguished guests, it becomes increasingly apparent that Jesus was not interested in the honor that comes from men. Indeed, his words likely aroused their disdain rather than their affection. But Jesus’ message sprang from his own character. In contrast to the other guests, Jesus sought only the honor of God, and he did so with profound humility. One student of the Savior’s life offered this depiction of his selfless nature:

Of the humility which consists in self-forgetfulness He was the perfect pattern. We cannot say that He thought *little* of Himself, but we may say that He thought not of Himself at all; He thought only of the Father’s glory and of man’s good. Considerations of personal aggrandizement had no place among His motives. He shrank with Holy abhorrence from all who were influenced by such considerations; no character appearing so utterly detestable in His eye as that of the Pharisee, whose religion was a theatrical exhibition, always presupposing the presence of spectators, and who loved the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi. For Himself He neither desired nor received honor from men. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: He, the greatest, humbled Himself to be the least—to be a child born in a stable and laid in a

manger; to be a man of sorrow, lightly esteemed by the world; yea, to be nailed to a cross. By such wondrous self-humiliation He showed His divine greatness.<sup>35</sup>

The Savior continued to show his disregard for the honors of men during the feast as he next addressed the host (see Luke 14:12). Witnessing the privileged social status of the other guests, Jesus counseled this Pharisee to invite a different sort to eat at his table, including “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13)—in sum, the kind of people who could not repay him. Then he would receive a reward “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). Censuring the host’s pride and exposing the pretentiousness of his motives, this bold instruction was similar to that which Jesus had given the other guests. We can follow the example and teachings Jesus Christ set forth in the home of the Pharisee by choosing to care more for the honor of God than for the honors of men. One way we might do this is to seek out and care for those who may be considered less popular, less accepted, or less important—just as Jesus did throughout his ministry (see Luke 4:16–19; 7:36–50; 15:1–2).

Jesus Christ carried on his mealtime instruction as he subsequently delivered the parable of the great supper. In the story, all who were initially invited to the supper “began to make excuse” (Luke 14:18) and declined to attend. The excuses given would have been considered insulting to the host in the parable, who symbolized the Lord. The first man claimed he needed to examine some land he had purchased but had never seen. The second claimed he needed to prove five teams of oxen he had purchased but had not tested. The third man stated, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Luke 14:20). While this final excuse seems more legitimate than the others (see Deuteronomy 24:5), it foreshadowed the Savior’s teaching in Luke 14:26 that even one’s spouse should not take priority over the Lord.

When we remember that the great supper in this parable represents the fulness of the blessings of the gospel that God offers to all of his children, it becomes clear that any excuse that may prevent us from partaking of those blessings withers in importance. Elder F. Melvin Hammond of the Seventy explained how this parable relates to the Lord’s disciples today: “We often must make significant changes in our lives in order to attend the feast at the table of the Lord. Too many of us put those changes off, thinking there is no urgency. Perhaps this parable could be called the ‘don’t bother me now, Lord’ parable. We try to excuse ourselves in various ways.”<sup>36</sup>

The parable of the great supper is also instructive concerning the role of agency in relation to our salvation, as a commentator explained: “The two essential points in His teaching are that no man can enter the Kingdom without the invitation of God, and that no man can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice. Man cannot save himself; but he can damn himself.”<sup>37</sup> While the Savior’s teachings during the meal at the home of the Pharisee were not directly addressed to those who identified themselves as his disciples (see Luke 14:1), they highlight important ideas concerning choice and sacrifice that Jesus Christ later reinforced as he spoke to his followers.

### **Jesus Christ Directs His Followers to Meet the Demands of Discipleship**

Transitioning from the mealtime setting at the house of a Pharisee, Luke gives us the following statement to provide context for the Savior’s teachings that follow: “And there went great multitudes with him” (Luke 14:25). This statement helps us understand the Savior’s audience and indicates he was again en route to Jerusalem. Turning to the crowd, Jesus declared: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). The term “hate not” in Luke 14:26 is translated from a word that can also convey the sense of “love less” (compare Matthew 10:37).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Jesus informed those who followed him that they must be willing “to put parents, family, relatives, even one’s own life, in subordination to discipleship.”<sup>39</sup> The Savior then attached a powerful visual image to this idea as he proclaimed, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). While today we often think of bearing one’s cross as a metaphor signifying the “troubles that come on those who earnestly endeavor to live as Jesus lived in this world,”<sup>40</sup> the multitude had good reason to interpret the statement literally. “A criminal carrying his cross on the way to execution must have been a familiar sight to many of Jesus’ hearers,”<sup>41</sup> and some in the multitude would actually conclude their lives as martyrs.

Having informed his followers of the requirements of discipleship, Jesus next prompted them to carefully determine their willingness to continue with him. The Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 14:27 adds this instruction from the Savior: “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you” (Luke 14:27, footnote *b*).



Elder Larry W. Gibbons of the Seventy commented on these powerful words: “I love that phrase ‘settle this.’ Brothers and sisters, I pray that we are ‘settled.’ There are precious blessings that come only from the complete yielding of one’s heart to God.”<sup>42</sup> Elder Gibbons then suggested an application of this verse that is particularly relevant for youth and young adults: “What a great thing it is to decide once and for all early in life what you will do and what you will not do with regards to honesty, modesty, chastity, the Word of Wisdom, and temple marriage. . . . Living the commandments will bring you the happiness that too many look for in other places.”<sup>43</sup>

Continuing his teaching to the multitude, Jesus Christ gave two analogies to illustrate the need for his followers to recognize the sacrifices they must be willing to make to persist as his disciples. The Savior began:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28–30)

While we often focus on the concept of “counting the cost” in this analogy, the Savior’s emphasis was not just on anticipating the requirements but also on meeting them. In fact, the word *finish* appears three times in the analogy. Jesus then proceeded to give his next analogy:

What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:31–32)

This illustration, like the first one, demonstrates the wisdom of considering the outcome of a decision before committing to action. Through these analogies, the Savior invited his hearers to use their powers of reason to make a deliberate choice. He prompted them to put forethought into their decision to follow him. He did not seek to sugarcoat the hard realities they would encounter if they continued as his disciples. In fact, after giving the two analogies, Jesus again advised the multitude as to the nature of sacrifice inherent in their decision: “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). The sequence of the Savior’s teachings in Luke 14:25–33 makes it clear that discipleship is not a casual choice to be made lightly. It may cost people their closest relationships, their lives, and

all that they have. But such is the choice one must make in order to follow Jesus Christ.

President Gordon B. Hinckley recalled the experience of a young man he knew in London who counted the cost required not only to enlist but to endure as a disciple of Jesus Christ:

I remember his coming to our apartment through the rain of the night. He knocked at the door, and I invited him in.

He said, "I've got to talk with someone. I'm all alone. I'm undone."

And I said, "What's your problem?"

And he said, "When I joined the Church a little less than a year ago, my father told me to get out of his home and never come back. And I've never been back."

He continued, "A few months later the cricket club of which I was a member read me off its list, barring me from membership with the boys with whom I had grown up and with whom I had been so close and friendly."

Then he said, "Last month my boss fired me because I was a member of this church, and I have been unable to get another job and I have had to go on the dole."

"And last night the girl with whom I have gone for a year and a half said she would never marry me because I'm a Mormon."

I said, "If this has cost you so much, why don't you leave the Church and go back to your father's home and to your cricket club and to the job that meant so much to you and to the girl you think you love?"

He said nothing for what seemed to be a long time. Then, putting his head down in his hands, he sobbed and sobbed. Finally, he looked up through his tears and said, "I couldn't do that. I know this is true, and if it were to cost me my life, I could never give it up."

He picked up his wet cap and walked to the door and out into the rain, alone and trembling and fearful, but resolute.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

Jesus Christ "stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) and taught his followers a host of lessons on discipleship along the way. At the outset of the journey, he tutored three men concerning the sacrifices that discipleship would entail in their lives. In Samaria and later while teaching the parable of the good Samaritan, he highlighted the virtues of patience and love. In the private setting of Martha's home and in public before a multitude of listeners, the Savior provided instruction on priorities and selflessness. In response to the threat from Herod, Jesus demonstrated courage, altruism, and faith in the Father's timing. While dining with Pharisees, he displayed and encouraged humility and warned against any excuse that might obstruct complete discipleship. Finally, Jesus directed his followers to make a conscious decision to

finish the journey of discipleship they had begun. As we study these teachings in context of the Savior's journey to Jerusalem, we can better appreciate how Jesus Christ reinforced his teachings on discipleship "with the eloquence of his example,"<sup>45</sup> and we can draw strength to "go, and do . . . likewise" (Luke 10:37). **RE**

## Notes

1. D. Todd Christofferson, "As Many as I Love, I Rebuke and Chasten," *Ensign*, May 2011, 97.
2. Christofferson, "As Many as I Love," 97; Elder Christofferson cited Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17, 30, 37.
3. The Italian poet Dante characterized Luke as "the scribe of the gentleness of Christ." Cited in Leighton Pullan, *The Books of the New Testament* (London: Covent Garden, 1901), 71; see also William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 5–6.
4. John's Gospel varies significantly in content from the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John does not mention the Savior's final departure from Galilee to Jerusalem.
5. Luke 9:52 indicates that Jesus traveled from Galilee to Samaria. In Luke 10:38, we read that he came to the house of Martha, which we assume was in Bethany, near Jerusalem (see John 11:1). However, in Luke 17:11, Luke states that Jesus was again in Samaria. These verses suggest that either Jesus traveled back and forth between certain points while eventually making his way to Jerusalem or that there are some discrepancies in Luke's ordering of these events.
6. Paul Borgman, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke—Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 14.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, "The Pathway of Discipleship," *Ensign*, September 1998, 13.
8. Jesus Christ repeated this procedure in Luke 10 by calling the Seventy and instructing them before sending them forth to preach and heal (see Luke 10:1–17). Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention the calling and mission of the Seventy.
9. "Not till an advanced period in His public ministry—not, in fact, till it was drawing to a close—did Jesus speak in plain, unmistakable terms of His death." A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 173. Veiled references of the Savior's suffering and death from earlier instances in his ministry include Matthew 9:15; 16:4; John 2:19; 3:14.
10. Compare with Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10.
11. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1936), 373.
12. See Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 240.
13. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 373.
14. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 779.
15. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Inconvenient Messiah," *Ensign*, February 1984, 68.
16. Fitzmyer, *Gospel According to Luke*, 28:241.

17. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 78–79.
18. See Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 306.
19. Howard W. Hunter, “Am I a ‘Living’ Member?,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 17.
20. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 140; Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 241–42.
21. See John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: A Type and Shadow of the Plan of Salvation,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 53.
22. Spencer W. Kimball, “Jesus: The Perfect Leader,” *Ensign*, August 1979, 7.
23. See Gower, *New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, 244–45.
24. Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 104.
25. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” 105, 107.
26. Cited in Dallin H. Oaks, “‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, August 1999, 12–13; emphasis added.
27. See Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 122.
28. Thomas S. Monson, “The Divine Gift of Gratitude,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 88.
29. M. Russell Ballard, “What Matters Most Is What Lasts Longest,” *Ensign*, November 2005, 44.
30. See *Gospel According to Luke*, 28A:996.
31. See *Gospel According to Luke*, 28A:997.
32. George Arthur Buttrick and others, *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1952–57), 8:249.
33. Neal A. Maxwell, “Plow in Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 59.
34. *Gospel According to Luke*, 28A:1045.
35. Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 202.
36. F. Melvin Hammond, “Parables of Jesus: The Great Supper,” *Ensign*, April 2003, 52.
37. *Gospel According to Luke*, 28A:1054.
38. *Interpreter’s Bible*, 8:259.
39. *Gospel According to Luke*, 28A:1062.
40. Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, 183–84.
41. Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, 8:260.
42. Larry W. Gibbons, “Wherefore, Settle This in Your Hearts,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 103.
43. Gibbons, “Wherefore, Settle This in Your Hearts,” 104.
44. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Loneliness of Leadership,” Brigham Young University Speeches (November 4, 1969), 3–4.
45. Maxwell, “Pathway of Discipleship,” 13.