

“Don’t Ever Let Nobody Drag Your Spirit Down”

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Luke 9:51-62 = dealing with discouragement

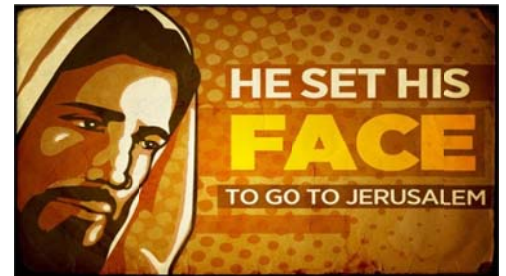
“Don’t Ever Let Nobody Drag Your Spirit Down.” Words from bluesman Eric Bibb, yet also words from Jesus.



Jesus knew that impediments would inevitably get in his way and our way. Jesus knew he had to prepare all his followers for discouragers who would try their best to “drag their spirits down.” The text today is a life lesson in Jesus’ way of dealing with the stumbling blocks which are set on

the path to God’s community:

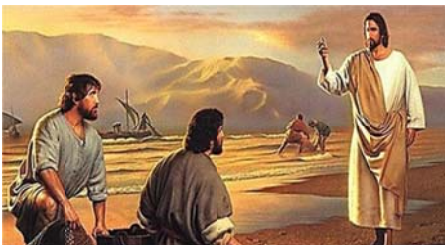
“When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive [Jesus], because his face was set toward Jerusalem.”



The reason the Samaritans “**did not receive**” Jesus was because Jesus had already let them know he would not be their step-n-fetch-it prophet. Jesus wouldn’t heal their sick nor preach what they wanted to hear.

Jesus had bigger fish to fry. He had a revolution to lead, false idols to bring down, a covenant to restore, a cross to bear. Jesus was on a mission. God had given him a fearsome purpose.

Then we see three great intimidators, stumbling blocks on the disciples’ path. The first Great Intimidator is the disciple’s call itself ~ the radical, overwhelming invitation into total obedience to God.



Just before our text today, Jesus had been telling the disciples that to follow him was not just an occasional, a weekend warrior thing. Each disciple must “**take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.**”¹

Our call is to lay everything down to follow Jesus: possessions, status, family, time, talent, treasure, all our hidden assets, life itself. Jesus is absolutely clear about this. Frightening? You betcha.



When confronted with this Great Intimidator, the temptation for every one of us is to take the path of least resistance. Jesus talks about the broad road and wide gate rather than the narrow gate and hard road. The easy path settles for part, not the whole enchilada ~ settles for being a half-hearted, part-time disciple.

The first impediment on the road to building God's realm is the call itself. The second is like unto it: When James and John saw the inhospitality of the Samaritans,

“they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But [Jesus] turned and rebuked [James and John].”



The second Great Impediment on the road to God's realm is the desire for vengeance: *“They don't like us. I want to hurt them.”* Well-meaning but mistaken Christians think discipleship is about gaining power over others. They think that following Jesus turns us all into Elijahs on Mt. Carmel calling down God's lightning on idolaters.

Isn't it odd: Jesus rebuked James and John, his own rather than the Samaritans who rejected him. Why?

- Because Jesus' way was not to return evil for evil, blow for blow, dislike for dislike, insult for insult, rejection for rejection
- Because Jesus had already told them what to do when rejected ~ they were to shake the dirt of that village off their feet and move on ~ to forgive and dismiss all plans for retaliation

Most of us want to be liked. Some of us will do most anything to be accepted. “Peer pressure” we call it. Some or even all of us will compromise our principles at some point in order to join the crowd. Instead a sound Biblical principle counters this. Jesus is saying:



"I can't give you a ... [guaranteed] formula for success, but ... a [guaranteed] formula for failure [is trying] to please everybody all the time."²

When we are in the place of not being accepted, to compensate we often respond with anger and mean-spiritedness. This is a very human reaction, but it is not Jesus' way. Rather Jesus' way is "to let go and to let God." Jesus' way is to turn the other cheek and forgive ~ to guard ourselves against confusing our desire for vengeance with God's will ~ to never fall into the trap of thinking God hates the ones I hate. Jonathan Swift hits the nail on the head:

"They have just enough religion to hate, but not enough to love."



Be careful what you pray for. Each and every time we recite the Lord's Prayer, we say: "let go of our sins, LORD, in exact proportion to how often we let go the sins of others against us." Whoa, that's scary. This is tough. Maybe that's why Jesus spoke of forgiving so often.

The second Great Intimidator: the need to liked, popular, the desire to please others, and failing that to lose self-control in ways unworthy.

The third Great Intimidator we see in our text today is: "Excuses, Excuses." These seem pretty innocuous. But life is simply full of excuses. Jesus had to answer a whole swarm.



"[One] said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.'"

Jesus had quick answers for all of them:

"Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ... "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

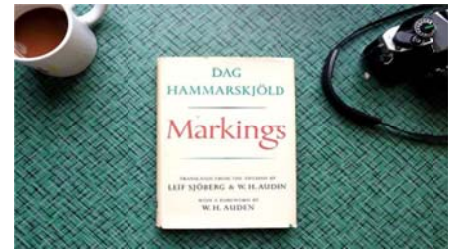


The third Great Intimidator: "I'll do it if it's convenient." Creature comforts, satisfactions, the quest for happiness, all kinds of impediments can get in the way of our response to God's call. We want God's great and glorious reign, but we prefer it on our

own terms. We resonate with all God does, but we would rather our role in it were half-hearted, a part time discipleship.

Every day there are just so many distractors, so many impediments. Every Day we are worn down by sometimes well-meaning, sometimes toxic people whose goal in life is to discourage us from achieving God's purpose. God never said that following Jesus would make us happy, but God guarantees that it will make us useful. It will give us purpose and give our lives meaning.

Dag Hammarskjöld knew something of discouragement. In his personal journal *Markings*, Hammarskjöld described one telling moment when the intimidators and the discouragers melted away:



“I don’t know Who ~ or what ~ put the question. I don’t know when it was put. I don’t even remember answering it. But at some moment I did answer *Yes* to Someone ~ or Something ~ and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self surrender, had a goal. From that moment on I have known what it means ‘not to look back,’ and ‘to take no thought for the morrow.’”³

Dag Hammarskjöld, the first Secretary General of the United Nations, was a tireless worker for the real Biblical vision of shalom, shared prosperity, justice and dignity for all people. He was overwhelmed by discouragement at times, but after that conversation with “Someone or Something,” he never let anyone drag his spirit down ever again.



Good advice from Jesus to us today: Don’t ever let the distractions, the intimidators, impediments, the cynicism of discouragers ever get you down! In the immortal words of Eric Bibb:

“You might slip, you might slide,
You might stumble and fall by the roadside
But don’t you ever let nobody drag your spirit down
Remember you’re walking up to heaven
Don’t let nobody turn you around.”⁴

¹ Luke 9:23

² Herbert Bayard Swope

³ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1964) p. 205

⁴ Eric Bibb "*Don't Ever Let Nobody Drag Your Spirit Down*" verse 1