

OpenTheo

Three Almost Disciples (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Three Almost Disciples (Part 2)", Steve Gregg discusses three individuals who were almost disciples of Jesus. He breaks down the stories of these three individuals and how their responses to Jesus' invitations varied. He examines the various reasons why someone might hesitate to answer the call of Jesus and stresses the importance of full dedication and loyalty in following Him. Gregg also touches on the topic of pacifism and urges Christians to trust in God's judgment rather than relying on weaponry and violence.

Transcript

...want me to go. Okay, well, here's what the price tag is. I need someone to travel with me under the stars, sleep in the cold and the rain.

And the man may have followed Him, we don't know, but since there's no... It doesn't say he did. I think the assumption is he didn't. You know, there's other cases where it says Jesus called the tax collector Matthew, and he left all and followed Jesus.

He called the four fishermen, and they left all and followed Him. Here it just says He called them, there's no reference to them following Him. So, I mean, I think it's probable that they didn't.

And that might be why, mercifully, they're left anonymous. So that He doesn't badmouth people by name who didn't, who couldn't pay the price. Now, the next guy, Jesus actually said to him, to another, follow me, verse 59, but he said, Lord, let me first go bury my father.

I've already mentioned that whether the man's father was really dead or not yet, the boy probably felt culture-bound, obligated to bury his father. That is, either wait till his father died and then bury him, or else, if he was already dead, bury him now. Now, Jesus' words to him did not indicate that a man is wrong to do his duty to his parents.

But He did bring something, He put a different spin on man's duty here. In verse 60, He said to him, let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of

God. Now, what does the expression mean, let the dead bury their own dead? Well, the dead who are to bury the dead, the first dead there, are in contrast to you.

There's two vocations here. There's a vocation of burying the dead, and there's the vocation of preaching the kingdom of God. You are called to preach the kingdom of God.

As far as burying the dead go, leave that to another category of people, the ones that Jesus calls dead. I think that the most reasonable way to understand this is that dead, in the first instance, is those who are spiritually dead, those who are not able to preach the kingdom of God because they're not in it. Those who don't have a call from Christ, those who are not believers, those who are not His disciples, there's plenty of those people around to bury dead bodies, and that's just the kind of thing they're well suited for.

Because all that takes is a strong back and a little bit of strength to dig a hole in the lower body and cover it up again. Anyone can do that. That doesn't take a spiritual man.

That doesn't take someone who's even spiritually alive to do that. A spiritually dead person can do that kind of mundane thing. But the kind of thing you're called to do, not everyone can do.

I'm calling you to preach the kingdom of God, and not everyone has that privilege. Of course, preaching the kingdom of God was the opposite of burying the dead. It was like raising the dead spiritually.

Now, those who are spiritually dead, the best thing they can do for dead people is bury them. But those who are spiritually alive can go out and raise them, as it were, spiritually. They can preach to the spiritually dead and bring them to spiritual life, bring them to the kingdom of God.

And so he's saying, I'm calling you to be alive. I'm calling you to have spiritual life and a spiritual mission of preaching the gospel. That's not a call that everyone was able to receive.

This is a special privilege. Burying fathers is that which other people could do. Presumably, if the boy had brothers, they could bury the father, if they were not followers of Jesus themselves.

They could bury the father. Or if they weren't available, then the neighbors could. Someone could.

We don't know the exact financial circumstances or family circumstances of the man who was to be buried. As I said earlier, if there was really a need, if this young man was the only person who could do the necessary thing, Jesus would have never called him from it, because Jesus affirmed that adults do have responsibilities to their aged parents. And certainly a dead father has to be buried by someone.

And if there was no one else to do it, Jesus would have never forbidden this man to do that. But it's clear he had, Jesus knew there were others who could do it. That's why he said, let them do it.

Let someone else do it who doesn't have a call like you've got on your life. Not everyone can do spiritual work. And there, you know, that should be a very important consideration if you're debating between two possible vocations, one spiritual and the other just a natural one.

Now, some Christians are called to what we call natural vocations. I mean, there are Christians called to be bankers and and, you know, newspaper reporters and factory workers and car dealers and things like that. I mean, things that anyone can do.

And there are some Christians called to do it. And if they do it, they do it unto the Lord. And if they do it unto the Lord, it's a ministry.

It becomes a spiritual thing, too. Because if a Christian is out working in a job that's generating money like that, because that person is a Christian, they are the Lord's and the money they earn is the Lord's. Therefore, they're earning profits for the kingdom of God.

And no doubt they are doing their best to be agents of the kingdom of God, even at the place of employment, if there's freedom to do so. Some jobs don't afford much opportunity to witness. Some do.

But the point is, anyone who's really committed to Christ, even if they're called to what some would call a natural kind of a vocation, they will be a supernatural agent in that position. They will be there as God's man or God's woman, and they will be doing God's work there. Even if the work they're doing is essentially like that which the unbelievers around them are doing.

But if that same person was called to go and preach or be a missionary or do something that obviously non-Christians can't do or shouldn't do, I think a few non-Christians have done it, but they shouldn't. There's been a few non-Christian televangelists, I think. If a person is called from a vocation which anyone could do, and the choice is between continuing in this vocation on the one hand or doing this spiritual thing, it's quite obvious that the spiritual work would take precedence over the other because presumably if someone has to build electronic equipment on an assembly line, that could be done by people other than Christians.

It may be that God wants that equipment built, who knows? But it doesn't take a Christian to do that kind of work, but it does take a Christian to be a missionary. It does take a Christian to answer a call to spiritual work. And the point here is we need to really sort things out here.

Are we refusing to take on a spiritual responsibility that we feel called to? Because we're tied to some kind of seeming responsibility in the natural which other people who are not even saved could do as well. What a waste of a life it would be if we spent our whole life doing something that someone else could do as well, when in fact we could have done something better that someone couldn't have done. I sort of take this approach among others when I'm talking when I think about war and Christians involved in war.

To my mind, this principle applies a lot of different ways, and I have a lot of different reasons besides this for thinking that Christians shouldn't fight in war, but this is one of them. Namely, Christians are called to do a spiritual warfare. Non-Christians can't do that.

Our spiritual warfare is prayer. Our spiritual warfare is evangelism. Our spiritual warfare is spreading the truth and making disciples.

Our spiritual warfare is battling the powers of darkness. Non-Christians can't do any of that. Now, the security of a nation really rests more on success in that kind of warfare than it does in success in physical warfare.

Do you know that? Because the Bible says that if a man's ways please the Lord, he'll make even his enemies to be at peace with him. And righteousness exalts a nation. God never has yet judged a nation with war that was a righteous nation.

Now, I don't know exactly where God stood on every war that's ever been fought in history, but all the wars recorded in the Bible were wars where God took credit for them and said that what he was doing was judging whoever it was that got defeated in the deal, even if it was Israel and Judah. It was a judgment of God at the hands of armies. Now, that judgment didn't require Christians to conduct it.

Babylonians, Assyrians, and other assorted pagans were quite capable of bringing about those temporal judgments on people. But prophets of God, because of the spiritual work they had done, on rare occasions caused a nation to survive, like Jonah. He didn't secure his own nation, but he secured Nineveh from destruction.

They would have been destroyed in 40 days, whether through war or some other means, we don't know. But no amount of armies of Ninevites could have spared Nineveh if God had determined to wipe them out. That's because of the preaching of one prophet, doing spiritual warfare, doing evangelistic work, bringing people to repentance, and bringing righteousness in the nation.

He spared the nation the judgment of God, and therefore preserved his life another 150 years, which their armies could never have done had God decided to judge them. This is the whole point of what the scripture says about war and national security throughout Old and New Testament. It says in Psalm 33, a horse is a vain thing for safety.

Neither is any king saved by its great strength. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. The Bible indicates that the best thing a nation can do to prolong its existence is to keep God on its side.

And the quickest thing a nation can do to eliminate itself from the face of the earth is to invoke the judgment of God upon it for its wickedness. Now, if God's judgment is on a wicked nation, I don't care if they've got all the nukes in the world. They can't stop God.

And if a nation's ways please the Lord, and he does not choose to judge them, then I don't care how many nukes their enemies have. They can't outfight God either. God is able to pluck missiles out of midair if he wants to.

I mean, how many scuds didn't go off in Israel during the desert storm war? I mean, Saddam Hussein kept dropping scud missiles all the time, which were supposed to be blowing up people, and I think the majority of them either didn't hit their targets or didn't go off. I mean, all this high-tech weaponry that's so impressive and scary and that everyone says we need so much of. If God doesn't want to judge someone, those missiles are just not going to do what their senders want them to do.

It's easy for God to thwart the weaponry of a nation. I mean, Gideon with 300 wiped out the overwhelmingly superior military might of the Midianites. And those kinds of situations make it clear that safety of a nation depends not on the size of its armies, but on the amount of its righteousness or at least if God's having a reason to keep them around.

Now for this reason, I might think we've gone off on a tangent. This is a bit of a tangent, but it's very related to this text here. It's a legitimate springboard into this subject.

If national security is our concern, and I think it is, we should seek to understand what contributes to national security most. Well, physical armies have something to do with it, it would seem. At least those are the agents that God uses.

But far more important for national security is the level of righteousness in a nation. And that righteousness cannot be promoted by armies. It can't be promoted by legislatures.

It can't be promoted by police forces, but it can be promoted by people who know their God and are strong and do exploits. It can be promoted by people who preach the truth and who pray powerfully. It can, in other words, be done through spiritual warfare.

Through the spiritual efforts of the church, which alone is capable of doing such things, a nation can be preserved with or without great military. Now, I'm not opposed to nations sending their unsaved people out to war or preparing them for war. If they want to do that, fine with me.

But let the dead do those kinds of things that the dead can do. Let those who are

spiritually dead do the part that can be done by anybody. What they can't do is wield mighty weapons that pull down strongholds, casting down imaginations and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Only living people can do that. Only spiritually alive people can do that. And that is our warfare.

The weapons of our warfare are not physical, not carnal. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood. Some do, but we don't.

Because we are wrestling against someone else. We're wrestling against spiritual principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual wickedness in high places. The idea is that there is a place for those who do go out and fight those physical kinds of battles.

Let those who can do nothing better do that. But don't call those who have a special mission, which is far more effective, be called from that mission in order to do that which is least effective. A Christian with a gun can do much less for his country than a Christian on his knees.

Now some might say, well, can't a Christian be out there on the battlefield and be on his knees too? After all, people pray a lot more on the battlefield than they do when they're at home. That is true, but it shouldn't be true. It should be the case that Christians pray as much at home as anyone does on the battlefield, because Christians are always on the battlefield.

The fact that Christians go to physical war or that their nation falls to invaders or whatever is simply sad commentary that the Christians were not involved or not effective in the spiritual warfare they were called to do. I would have no trouble interpreting such a thing to be the case if, for instance, this country fell to invaders. I wouldn't say it was because we trimmed down our military budget.

Although a lot of people are scared because Clinton's doing that right now, you know, closing military bases and stuff like that. It might be a stupid thing for a non-Christian president to do, and I'm not here to comment whether he ought or ought not to do that particular thing. But if this nation collapses, it won't be because of what Clinton decided to do with the military.

It'll be with what the Christians failed to do in the warfare they've been called to do. And the saddest thing of all is that many, if there is such a war and we ever lose it, many Christians who should have been preventing such on their knees and in their evangelistic efforts and so forth will have in fact neglected that, but will be out fighting the physical warfare. They'll be out there fighting with guns and tanks.

Yeah, I think not. Oh wait, you mean because of their current situation, because of when

they came under communism? Well, I don't know that the nation is, I mean, the Union has fallen apart, of course, and there's a lot of bad stuff going on over there. But actually Christians have a lot more freedom than they've ever had, that is, that they had for a long time.

I would say that although there's shortages of food and things like that, God's looking to that. I mean, there's Christians, you know, taking food and money and stuff over there too for them. I mean, I don't know of any case, maybe there are cases, I have never heard of a case where a Christian is starving or anything like that.

The nation was certainly guilty of great unrighteousness, and if we say the nation is being punished, I don't know that it's the fact that the Christians over there were not recently praying enough. I think if anything, it's the wickedness, the wicked aspects of the nation that have come under punishment. The righteous are being vindicated over there, and that may very well be because the Christians have been praying harder under communism than they did before.

I think that the evidence that Christians were not praying enough was seen in the Bolshevik Revolution, and when the communists did take over, that was a real judgment on the nation of Russia, at least in the other nations that came under it. And I think that studying the history of the church in Russia prior to that, it'd be easy to say it was a judgment that was brought on unnecessarily if the church had been the church. I mean, the church was corrupt.

The Russian Orthodox Church before the revolution was very corrupt, and a study of that particular time in history would make it very clear that the church was not being the church. The church was not waging its warfare of righteousness, and therefore the nation came under the judgment of communism. I'd say the fall of the communist government, even though it's been accompanied with economical woes and even ethnic wars, race wars, and things like that, that is a judgment on the wicked.

But I don't think it's... I think in a sense we see the vindication of the righteous. Like the fall of the Roman Empire. I think in a sense the fall of the Roman Empire was good for Christianity.

In another sense it may not have been as good as it might have otherwise been because the church had compromised a great deal before Rome fell. It began compromising under Constantine, and it was a couple centuries later before the empire fell. I'd say when the church becomes effeminate and weak and loses its battle mentality and just becomes comfortable in the world, that I'd say eventually bad things happen in the nation.

I think that's the problem here in the West right now. But I guess we have to determine at what point a particular national event could be interpreted as a judgment. Because on

one side the fall of the Iron Curtain could be called a judgment on communism.

But is it a judgment on Russia, or is it a good thing for Russia? I mean, economically it hasn't proved to be profitable yet. But in the long run, if they keep their freedoms, it'll probably be better for them than communism ever was. I mean, it's really hard to know how to interpret the whole situation over there because it's got its pluses and its minuses.

But I'd say, all in all, I think the Christians have probably figured it's better the way it is now than it was ten years ago. But I guess I'd have to talk to them to know for sure if that's how they feel about it. If I was a Christian there, I'd think so.

I'd rather be poor. I'd rather have an empty stomach and have the freedom to raise my children as Christians than have the government filling my cupboard. Of course, they never filled it very well over there, but keeping me alive, but taking my kids from me and educating them in communist schools.

So I think, I guess it's a matter of perspective whether what's happened is good or bad. I personally think it's good. But the point I'm making is that Christians are called to do things that non-Christians cannot do.

Those things are really spiritual ministry. Seen one way, spiritual ministry is a warfare. And to be called away from natural warfare, physical warfare, into a spiritual warfare is not to do nothing for your country, it's to do the most effective thing you can.

To preserve your country against the judgment of God. And this is the answer that pacifists should give when they're confronted by people who say, well, you Christians who talk about pacifism, you Mennonites or whatever, you don't mind benefiting from the hard-won privileges that have been won through war. I mean the freedoms you enjoy every day and even the ongoing security.

The military has made America and Canada and this part of the world a pretty secure place from invasion. And you benefit from that security, you benefit from that freedom. You allow yourself to benefit from the police departments and the fire departments and the public roads and the federal programs or whatever.

And yet you won't defend it. This is what we often hear when we suggest pacifism. We even hear this from Christians who aren't pacifists.

Well, we benefit from these things, shouldn't we make a contribution to them? Well, the fact of the matter is every citizen pays taxes. And that is a contribution we make to things like police and fire and roads and things like that. And I mean we do pay our fair share.

As far as the freedom and the security the country has, it's true we benefit from it. And

it's true that the physical agents that may be looked to as having brought it about or maintained it are the armies. But Christians have a different perspective.

It's not the armies that preserve our freedoms. There's countries with larger armies than ours that don't have the freedoms we have because they have dictators and things like that. The blessings of this society are a gift from God.

And it would be wrong to attribute them to any human agency. And how long God will keep giving us these gifts, I don't know. But certainly it is the presence of the church in the western countries that has made them desirable places to live.

You can go to Kuwait if you'd like to and find an oil-rich country or Saudi Arabia. And there's a country that has natural resources enough to make them some of the wealthiest people in the world. But who'd want to live there? There's been no influence or almost no influence from the church.

There's no righteousness there. And man, the freedoms, peace, the things that we enjoy are not to be had there. I don't know any American woman that would like to go live over there under the conditions that women live under.

And as far as security goes, the place is a powder keg. It's not for lack of armies or money. They've got the armies, they've got the money, but they don't have God.

And that makes a difference. Now our country doesn't have God as much as it used to, but there's still powerful influence of a very strong Christian representation in this part of the world, in the countries of the western world. And it's possibly like God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous.

It's possible that God has spared these corrupt countries as long as he has because of the presence of a certain representation of righteous who are still praying and still working in this part of the world. But how long he'll do so, we don't know. Who had a hand up over there? Jamie, was yours there? Someone else? No? Oh, Jefferson.

Very few. Well, see, I'm not opposed to working on the fire department or any other service. See, I'm not opposed to Christians working in secular or even state jobs.

There are certain state jobs I think that would go against the principles of a Christian to fill, at least should go against the principles of Christians to fill. There are some state jobs you can't get without dishonesty or without some other kind of compromise. But something like a volunteer fire department or even a regular fire department or a lot of other kinds of agencies the government does, I'm sure that Christians can serve there.

But the point is, what I'm saying is a Christian should be wherever God calls him to be. And a lot of times people will be somewhere not because there's a call from God but because they think if they don't do it, who's going to? There are, you know, I think

people, for instance, I don't know what reason, I was talking about the military a while ago and I think that's what led to the question about the fire department, the firework and stuff like that. I think most people go into the military because they have a sense that someone's got to keep the nation secure.

And the fact of the matter is, that's true. God's got to keep the nation secure. And if people go in thinking that if their body isn't there on the lines with a gun in the hand, that the nation's going to be less secure, then I think they're thinking in a worldly way rather than a distinctly Christian way.

Now as far as firefighting or ambulance driving or working as a medical person, obviously you do that too because you see a need, but you should do it mostly because those are just the kinds of things that are consistent with being a Christian. That is serving humanity, serving the community, helping people, and most importantly that you feel called of God to be in that kind of a role as opposed to some other role that you might be called to. Okay, so what I'm saying is, Christians may well be called to do many of the same things that the dead do.

I've known a Christian funeral director. I wonder how many people said to him, let the dead bury the dead, you know, you go preach the gospel. There's nothing wrong with being a Christian funeral director.

The Christian can bury the dead too, as long as they haven't been called by Jesus to do something else. And that's just the point. Jesus had called this guy, come follow me, and the guy says, well, wait, I got another obligation here.

Now, if Jesus had not called him, there would have been not a thing in the world wrong with him staying home and burying his father or whatever, you know, if he didn't have a different call in his life. And this is the point. It's not the vocation of burying the dead that is inappropriate for Christians.

It's not the vocation of working in some secular employment or even a state job that's inappropriate for Christians. What's inappropriate for Christians is to think that their family duties or their civic duties or any other thing, which could be carried out by someone else who's not a Christian just as easily, are any good reason to neglect the special call of God if they're called to do something in the area of ministry or some spiritual work that others could not do. So this is not a put down on people who are in the business of burying the dead or any other thing that non-Christians could do, so long as they're not called to do something else.

But if they are called to do something else, they have to realize the thing they're leaving behind, that job can be filled by another who doesn't have the call on their life that you have. Someone who's spiritually dead can do a lot of those mundane things that many Christians are doing presently and could move into that position if those Christians were

called out of those roles to do something more ministry-oriented. Let's take this last guy, verse 61.

And another also said, Lord, I'll 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. Now, a couple of Old Testament parallels here.

In Exodus chapter 4, when God called Moses, of course God called him in chapter 3, I believe. Am I thinking of the right chapter here? Let me just confirm that I've got the right chapter. Okay.

Yeah, when God called Moses to go to leave his father-in-law's house, the priesthood meeting, Jethro's house, and go down to face Pharaoh, he went back to Jethro. It says in Exodus 4.18, So Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt to see whether they're still alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace.

Now, here Moses had a call from God, a call to go to Egypt. And he goes back and gets permission from his father-in-law. I've heard people say this, especially people who are into the shepherding thing, that say you should always submit to authorities even if they tell you something that God says not to do.

They've often used this illustration. People in the shepherding movement, they say, Well, you may think that God's told you to do something, but unless the authorities release you, you can't do it. Just like Moses.

He even had a call at the burning bush from God himself, but he didn't go without getting permission from his father-in-law. I'd like to suggest that this is a misuse of the passage. First of all, there's no suggestion that Moses was obligated to get his father-in-law's permission for anything, whether God called him or not.

The man wasn't his father, and Moses was a grown man. After all, he was 80 years old. He was just doing the polite thing.

He'd been living in the man's house for 40 years, and he didn't want to just disappear. I mean, he could have, but he didn't need to. He had time to go back and get his things, get his wife and kids, and say goodbye to his father-in-law.

His goodbye did take the form of, please let me go, but that was more or less just a polite way of saying I'm leaving. And, you know, there's not the slightest suggestion that if Jethro had said, ah, but Moses, where am I going to find another shepherder like you to watch my flocks like you've done the last 40 years? I was counting on you being here for at least another 40. Then Moses would have said, ah, well, maybe I won't go to Egypt then.

I guess you're right. I'll stay here and tend the sheep. No way.

If Jethro had not given his blessing to go, Moses would have gone anyway. I mean, we don't know that for sure to be true, but it's hardly imaginable that it would be otherwise. He'd gotten a call from God in the burning bush, he's going to disobey God because his father-in-law needs someone to watch the sheep.

So, I mean, the point here is, it was just kind of polite to go back and seek the blessing of, you know, those who were your elders and where you've been living. In 1 Kings, chapter 19, we have something that's so parallel, so similar to what we're reading here in Luke, that I wonder if Jesus had it in mind even in the answer that he gave. 2 Kings, excuse me, 1 Kings, chapter 19, this is when Elijah called Elisha to sort of become his successor, his disciple and eventually his successor.

And in the last verses of 1 Kings 19, that's verses 19 through 21, it says, So he, that is Elijah, departed from there and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelve. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, Please let me kiss my father and my mother, meaning kiss them goodbye.

And then I will follow you. It sounds almost exactly like this guy that Jesus, this guy said, I'll follow you, but let me first go say goodbye to my mother and my father. Almost exactly the same thing.

And Elijah said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you? So Elisha turned back from him and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh using the oxen's equipment and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and served him. Now, it's not real clear exactly whether Elijah did or did not allow him to go back and kiss his father and mother.

He asked for it, but Elijah's answer to him is very unclear. He said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you? Now, go back again might have been sarcastic. Well, if you're going to put your hand on the plow and turn back, then go on back.

I must have made a mistake in choosing you. What have I done? Go on back. If you're not going to follow me without going back to kiss your father and mother, welcome to it.

Go back. In other words, he might have been saying, Well, then you're disqualified. Just like Jesus said, He that puts his hand upon and looks back is not worthy for the kingdom of God.

That's how Jesus answered this guy who made that statement. Elijah might have been saying something like that. And Elisha may have not gone back to his family.

It says Elisha turned back from Elijah, but that's because Elijah had walked past the yoke

of oxen. Elisha may have only turned back so far as the yoke of oxen where he slaughtered them and offered sacrifices and fed the workers out in the field, then took off with Elijah without going back and kissing his father and mother. It's not clear.

I mean, the story is obviously abbreviated. We don't know whether Elisha went back and said goodbye to his parents or not, but there's no record of him actually doing it. He does request it.

And Elijah's answer is not clear to us from the briefness of it, whether it's a yes or no answer. But we don't have record of Elisha going back. Instead, he just, he destroyed, he burned his bridges behind him.

That's what he did. He destroyed the thing that had been his vocation at that moment, the plow and the oxen, offered them to the Lord and went off with Elijah. Now, it seems to me that Jesus' answer to this guy might even contain the germ of an allusion to this story of Elijah and Elisha, because although he doesn't mention Elijah and Elisha, he said to him, no one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Now, of course, putting your hand to the plow just means, you know, starting a work. But why did he use that illustration? Why did he use that particular metaphor? He doesn't use it elsewhere. And it's in exactly a situation where a guy's saying exactly what Elisha had said.

Elisha had his hand to a plow at that time. I think Jesus might be deliberately alluding back to that situation, saying, well, listen, just like Elisha had to give up the plow, as it were, and offer it up to the Lord and follow Elijah, you're going to have to give up your connections and your desire for approval from your family and so forth. Now, there was a cult, it still is, but they have a different name now.

They used to be called the Children of God. They changed the name from time to time because they're involved in illegal activities and they have to kind of cover their trail. But back in the early 70s, they were in Los Angeles under the name Children of God, followers of a guy named David Berg, calls himself Moses David.

And they're around still, very immoral people. But they professed to advocate a very strong discipleship, a very strong consecration to the cult, really, or to God, as they would represent it. And they used to use this kind of verse.

You can't go back and say goodbye to your mother and father. They would go out on beaches with a bus and evangelize people. Teenagers are on the beach and say, if you turn to Christ, you have to come to our commune and become a disciple.

And they wouldn't even let these kids notify their parents where they were. They'd just sweep them off to the commune. And there's other cults that have done the same kind

of thing, using this verse.

As if Jesus was saying you should never have a chance to go back and say goodbye to your parents if you're called to be a missionary. Now, it's clear Jesus didn't approve of this man's motives, whatever they were. We can only deduce it.

But there are many, many other cases where persons that Jesus called were not forced to cut off their family instantly. I mean, Peter was called to be a disciple and he still got to stay home with his mother-in-law and his wife and probably children for some time. In fact, he even played host to Jesus and the other disciples.

Peter's family dwelling became the place that Jesus stayed in more often than anywhere else. So, a person who was called to be a disciple is not... It didn't just go with the territory that you cut off yourself from your family forever afterwards. But it certainly means that if you're a slave to your parents' approval, and that may be what we should read between the lines here.

This man, it's suggested this guy may not be fit for the kingdom of God. Why? Just because he wants to say goodbye to his parents? Well, there must have been more there than meets the eye. And it doesn't take too much imagination to figure what it is.

Presumably, this man would... And Jesus, of course, saw more into it than we can just reading the text. But presumably, Jesus saw that this man's parents would seek to dissuade him. And that this man was sufficiently servile to his parents that he'd submit to them.

That he'd go back to tell his parents goodbye, perhaps, with all true intentions of following Jesus. But the disapproval of his parents on that enterprise would actually spoil his resolve. And he would end up not coming after all.

In any case, if that's the true scenario or not, it seems clear that Jesus was making a demand on this guy that he didn't always make demands of everyone. He was saying, listen, what you're asking to do is really tantamount to looking back while you're plowing forward. Now, I've never pushed a plow.

But I've been told that when you're plowing, one thing you have to do is keep looking straight ahead. And I've heard of people who have plowed behind oxen, or who have plowed behind horses or mules. And they say, you know, if you don't keep right on it, looking ahead all the time, it's easy to go off and do a crooked furrow.

In fact, I've heard people say that they have looked around just for a moment while they're plowing. And as the plow was going forward and they looked around, they'd look back and they'd already kind of gotten off the straight line. So the idea is when you're plowing a field, something that takes total concentration and total dedication, anyone who's so sloppy about it as to look around and not care about towing a straight line, that

person doesn't deserve to be behind the plow in the first place.

You shouldn't take on a job that commands your full attention and your full dedication, your full loyalty, if you're not going to be able to bring such full loyalty to it. If you're so careless about it that, you know, you've got a job that requires you to keep looking ahead, but you're looking around, you're not fit for that kind of a job. And this is essentially what he was saying to this person, it would seem, was that, you know, I'm calling you to a task that requires that you keep both hands and both eyes permanently involved in looking at the goal, looking at the task, bringing your full concentration to the matter.

And if you're one of those people who are going to be distracted by whether your parents approve or not, then let's just not even consider yourself called. By the way, Jesus didn't call him. He's one of those who volunteered.

Jesus didn't call him. Jesus never called anyone, I think, who... Well, it's hard to say. I guess the rich young ruler was a case of Jesus calling a man.

But the man did approach Jesus first. But Jesus did say, follow me, to him. It's hard to know exactly whether Jesus called a man who wasn't qualified in that case, or whether the man was, in a sense, the initiator there.

But one thing that has been pointed about the last two cases that we've read about here in this passage, the last two guys, is that both of them said, me first. In verse 59, the second guy said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And in 61, the guy said, I'll follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are in my house.

And it's been sometimes pointed out that their problem, and the reason they were disqualified, if they were from being disciples, was because, for them, everything had to be me first. And that is, of course, the natural priority that men have, unless they die to their self. It's natural enough to put self-interest first.

And me first is really the guiding motto of virtually everyone, except for a very few who have died to self, who have taken up a cross, and denied themselves, and said, not me first, me last. When I was in Sunday school, some of you, any of you that grew up in Sunday school, and I know some of you did, probably heard this. I remember in Vacation Bible School, when I was a little kid, you didn't get through it without memorizing the joy formula.

Anyone who's been to Sunday school probably knows what the joy formula is. Jesus, others, and you. Right? J-O-Y.

Put Jesus first, others next, and you last. And that's where joy is. That's really quite a good little acronym or whatever, acrostic, for kids.

And for grown-ups too. Because the natural order is the reverse. To put yourself first, others second, because by doing what they want, you can often get what you want out of them, and God last.

But, of course, to be a disciple, you have to turn the natural priorities on their head, the other way. It can't be me first. It has to be Jesus first, and everything else last, really.

Everything else follows far behind, in terms of loyalty that you have to Jesus. He's got to be the one that's first, and total consecration. That's like plowing a field.

You've got to give it your full attention. And so with following Christ, you need to give that your full dedication, your full loyalty. And if you do, then of course you'll be happy about it.

But if you don't, it'll be probably because you had a problem with the me first syndrome. So, we don't know what the fate was of these men. I think we probably should assume they didn't follow Jesus, because it doesn't say they did.

Though that might be a pessimistic way of looking at it. Certainly there's a reason that their story is told. And the reason their story is recorded is because they obviously miscalculated what the cost of discipleship was, and had to be corrected.

Whether they received that correction and still continued on to follow Jesus, we don't know. But there are certainly many like them, who think they will follow the Lord, but discover the hard way. That either the comforts of home, or the responsibilities of home, or the approval of home gets in the way.

Not willing to sacrifice those things in order to have the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and the responsibilities of discipleship, and the approval of God. Those are the things that are certainly to replace the other. All right, well, that's about all we have time for on this subject.