

## **FOUR STEPS INTO A DEEPER CHRISTIAN LIFE**

**Luke 14:1–35**

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We're going to share this chapter together section by section. Rather than reading it all at once, we will read it a section at a time. I've taken this message from Luke 14 and entitled it "Four Steps Into a Deeper Spiritual Life."

To me it's always a challenge to look at the Lord's Word and then understand what it was saying and then take and see how it relates to where we are in our own spiritual life development today. As you read a chronological portion of the Lord's ministry, you'll notice that that chronological portion is not always arranged along a topical theme. So those that teach the Bible always look at the passage after having understood it and say, "How does this tie together so that it doesn't become simply an exercise in a history lesson but a practical application for our lives?"

I always try, as I look at the Scripture, to find some theme that unifies it, even if the unifying theme was not perhaps in the author's original intent. In order to find the Scriptures as a cohesive teaching portion for us in any particular service, I want to find that thread which ties all of it together. The thread this evening that struck me as I was preparing this message was the deeper spiritual life. As you read this particular chapter, it might surprise you that I chose that title to illustrate the events that are in this chapter. For all intents and purposes, what is here in Luke 14 is not necessarily speaking of what we envision as the deeper life. Many times we think of the deeper Christian life as somewhat mystical in nature; or plunging deeper into Scripture and causing us to be aware of some emphases in the Scripture which will maybe be obscure to others but for us have the golden key which will unlock spiritual development.

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Recently, in one of our presbytery meetings, a minister was invited to come in and share with us the new teaching he had discovered in his church which has become the dividing means of separating that body from one another. It turned out that the whole ministry of this one pastor hinged around a word from the Greek found in Hebrews. He had discovered a television evangelist who was teaching this doctrine; and somehow a truth that the church had never discovered for twenty centuries had suddenly become the most fascinating and penetrating and scintillating truth, and if you weren't in on this truth, you were spiritual babes.

I always question anything that hasn't been taught for twenty centuries. I have a feeling the Holy Spirit intended its neglect. But on the other hand, some people's view of the deeper spiritual life is to get into something mystical and hidden and esoteric.

Jesus' view of the deeper life would lead us into a more wholesome and practical view of life.

Based on these incidences that are in Luke 14, if you were to ask me, "How could I live a more committed Christian life, a deeper spiritual life?" I think Luke 14 would serve as an excellent text for answering that question.

**I. The first step that is in this chapter in living a more committed personal life spiritually is a personal lifestyle that's rooted in righteousness and not in legalism.**

Verses 1–6 say, "One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, He was being carefully watched. There in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, He healed him and sent him away. Then he asked them, 'If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?' And they had nothing to say" (Luke 14:1-6, NIV).

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As we read along in the Gospel of Luke, it's fascinating to see that Jesus had many dinner invitations. This is not the first time He has been at a dinner with a Pharisee. The last time in the Gospel of Luke we found Him at dinner with a Pharisee was when a woman came up and was wiping His feet with her tears, taking her hair and drying them off. The Pharisee was very uncomfortable with this procedure. Jesus, we know, liked to eat and He liked to eat with various kinds of people. Maybe that is one mark of a spiritual life—a person wholesome enough to sit down and enjoy a good meal without every moment of life being so utterly serious that they can't enjoy table fellowship with others. Jesus was comfortable, whether it was in Mary and Martha's house in Luke 10:38, where He goes for dinner, or with Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7, or here, while He's in the home of a prominent Pharisee. This time, however, in the home of the Pharisee, the dinner is different than all the others because the dinner is on the Sabbath.

When we're in Israel on the Sabbath day, we notice an immediate difference in the food. Every other morning we get freshly cooked eggs. We get toast. But on Sabbath morning, the eggs are hard-boiled because they've been prepared the previous day and there is no toaster because you don't cook on the Sabbath.

That's the way it was in Jesus' day also. If you had a dinner on the Sabbath, this meant all the food had to be prepared in advance. It's part of the legalism of the occasion (that this must be done). William Barclay has an excellent description as to the length to which the Pharisees went to make sure that they did not work by cooking on the Sabbath. Yet, they wanted to keep the food warm. So how do you have the activity of keeping the food warm without actually breaking the Sabbath? Here was the rule. All food had to be cooked on Friday. The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday. If it was necessary to keep it hot, it must be kept hot in such a way that it was not cooked any more. So the food to be kept warm for the Sabbath must not be put in oil

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dregs, manure, chalk, salt or sand—whether moist or dry—nor into straw, skins, flock or vegetables. The idea being that the compost of any of these materials might raise the temperature. The food may be put into clothes, amidst fruits, pigeon feathers and flax towel. This is the atmosphere to which Jesus comes. Of course, He's already done very radical things. Mark 7 tells us that He has declared all foods clean and wiped out all the kosher laws with His teaching. He's said, "It's not what goes on in the inside of us that defiles us but that which comes outside." A purely revolutionary idea. The Pharisees are sitting there, watching Him on the Sabbath day, knowing His feelings of this legalistic interpretation of life. He challenges them through this instance of a man they have brought in as the prop—the man with the dropsy—because they know He has this habit of healing on the Sabbath. So they have brought the man there and we know that they've brought him there, from the little inference that He was being carefully watched. So it's a set-up kind of a job.

I simply use this to suggest to us that, if you're looking for a deeper spiritual life, it will not come by simply surrounding yourselves with a set of rules. It's been the mistake of all those who have walked in legalism, whether they've been of the Pharisaic legalistic variety before Christ or whether they have sought to bring Pharisaism into the Christian church in the form of the Judaizers or holiness people, that emphasized external righteousness to the exclusion of the reformation of internal attitudes and heart disposition. The legalist inevitably makes some critical mistakes. He focuses upon the external rather than the internal. He can spot what someone else is doing wrong by looking at them or by looking at their dress, and fails to focus on the internal things—what God may be doing inside their life, independent of any outward trapping. The legalist is noted for a marked failure of compassion. Pharisees on this occasion have evidently no compassion for the man with dropsy. They've got him there as a test case.

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I am not a medical authority. I think dropsy is kind of an old English term. Maybe it's still in vogue. Perhaps there's another medical name for it now. It is an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body, which is a sign that illness may be affecting the kidneys, liver, blood, and/or heart. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees associated dropsy with a grievous sin. If you had dropsy or leprosy, you really had done something wrong. So rather than looking at an individual from a compassionate side, they look with legalism—which is inevitably their first stance towards another and is judgmental.

Legalism carries with it an inability to diagnose self. Legalism is always able to see what is wrong with the other person, but it's unable to look in a mirror and see self. Then legalism focuses on the rule of law with punishment rather than love and grace. Legalism inevitably winds up as personally inconsistent. Jesus points this out by saying, “You will save an animal on a Sabbath day. What is wrong with Me ministering and healing this man?” Jesus calls for a spiritual life that is not rooted in its spirituality on a certain code of external rules, but He wants righteousness to be a matter of the inside. He wants our dealings with other people to be full of compassion and grace. That's one mark of a deeper spiritual life: a compassionate person who is no longer sitting in judgment upon other people and their motives and their external actions. That's not to say we throw away all discernment and pretend that everything wrong is right. I'm not suggesting that. But I'm suggesting the shying away from a heart attitude that is able to see the wrongs in others and unable to see where God needs to change oneself.

### **II. The second step into a deeper spiritual life that's found in Luke 14 is genuine humility and hospitality.**

“When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ‘When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a

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person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, “Give this man your seat.” Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, “Friend, move up to a better place.” Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ Then Jesus said to His host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous’” (Luke 14:7–14, NIV).

Jesus is talking about sitting around and eating and He’s making a reference to what is called the triclinium, which is the arrangement of the table in the time of Jesus in which you have low lying tables where guests are reclining on their left elbow. The tables were arranged in a U-shape and the chief spot was the center of the U. The next spot was for the gentleman who was at the guest of honor’s right. The third spot was to the left. And so on. Each table was appropriately arranged as to who was in the place of honor. Jesus was noting the pride of the Pharisees to clamor for the good places, and sometimes the embarrassment of someone who reached for more. I’ve seen this, not just in the Bible and the Pharisees, but among people who are fellow-believers with me in the kingdom of God. It will be a real test of your spirituality if, when we have a dinner or a banquet at the church, you wait and let everyone else get the best tables. There seems to me to be a little nudging and edginess that goes on. I’ve had it in myself so I’m not sitting in judgment on anybody. In fact, I wanted to have a better seat one time at a banquet I was at recently. I was bemoaning the fact that we were running late and would have to sit in the back of the room,

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where I couldn't see anything. Lo and behold, some people who had gotten there before us saved a place for me up front. Then this Scripture comes to me about my motives and about humility.

It's downright disgusting how the Bible can be so pointed.

False humility involves needless self-effacement. False humility doesn't mean scraping along and pretending we're being more humble than we need to be. I struggle with that because people will come and say to me sometimes, "Pastor, you gave a fine message (or teaching)." My earliest impulse was to say, "It wasn't me. It was the Lord." Which is true. But at the same time, I was putting myself deliberately down. Over a period of time, I think the Lord has helped me bring back to balance that when somebody pays you a compliment, don't let it go to your head and don't put on false humility. Just say, "Thank you," and move on. I've found the Lord is very good at pointing out your weak points. Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, "The great problem is you don't have humility." I'm not sure that I know how to tell anyone to be humble, except to consciously seek to put others first.

Dr. Bob Munger was my doctoral advisor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a great Presbyterian pastor. He is the one who wrote the little booklet *My Heart, Christ's Home*. Dr. Munger was one of those professors that you could go to the classroom with and it suddenly became, not an exchange of information, but an experience of relationship.

I'll never forget one class period. We were talking about this matter where Jesus says, "He who exalts himself will be humbled." Dr. Munger went to the chalkboard and drew a triangle and he said, "This is how the world looks at success." The triangle is where we all begin, at the bottom of the ladder. We work like crazy to work up until we can get to the pinnacle of the triangle, because the higher we get, there more people who are underneath us and the more people who are supporting us. What we must do in the Christian life is flip the triangle over so that the

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pinnacle of the triangle points downward and we all start at the same level. The goal of the Christian life is to keep working down so that you are more and more supportive of other people. When you've got to the point of the triangle and are the servant of all, then you've reached the ideal that Christ talks about in regard to humility. This was a beautiful illustration for me. Jesus then takes this point of humility, which He defines as such an essential requirement for our spiritual life, and extends the thought to hospitality. He's saying to us, "Be a giver rather than a taker."

We had Karen Maines at our church years ago. She has written a book on hospitality, *Open Heart, Open Home*. She talks about the difference between truly being hospitable and entertaining people. So often when we have people to our home or to our apartment, we're so concerned about how the place looks that it's easy to concentrate on the preparations and the impression we're going to make rather than concentrating on the person that we have invited. Karen has suggested that we make a distinction between entertainment and hospitality.

And I would simply say that Jesus' teaching on hospitality here is so radical, that if there's currently not any hospitality going on in your life to other people, begin by taking your peers and being hospitable to them before reaching out into some of the extreme kinds of hospitality that Jesus is talking about here. But He's saying that our Christian walk must go beyond the comfy relationships and associations we have with those we know. If we want to drive our spiritual life deeper, we will get out into the highway and the byway of need and extend ourselves to those who cannot pay us back.

So we think of ministry in places that are difficult to minister in. I find it difficult, at times, to go into rest homes. It is not a pleasant experience to go into rest homes. You can come out so depressed from a convalescent center; you can hardly navigate the rest of the day. But Jesus says,

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“As part of our Christian experience, we need to take on this ministry of reaching out to the least and the last.” I’m glad to see our young people are beginning to emphasize this and visiting and ministering within convalescent homes. We need to be aware of ministry at Fairview and mental retardation efforts and foster care and ministry in homeless shelters and ministry in centers for abused women. We need to look, as individuals and as the body of Christ, for those who are in our own society with whom we can be hospitable that can never, never pay us back. “True religion,” James says, “is to visit the widow and the orphan.”

I am impressed with the fact that Jesus would identify deeper spiritual life as not necessarily being located in growing in piety. We all want to do that. We want to be more spiritual within. But He expresses it also in terms of the outflow of our life in ministry to others. It would be well, as tonight we consider this very vital passage of the Gospel of Luke, that we ask ourselves—if we are not involved in some way in ministry and hospitality to someone who cannot pay us back—if God could help us, before we leave this service this evening, to focus on intentions in ministry in that area of our life. We’ll grow quickly as we do that.

One of the real breakthroughs for me as a young person was being taken by my church youth group, and when you’re part of a group you go where the group goes. We had a regular ministry at a tuberculosis sanitarium outside of Springfield, Missouri. It was one of the real influences in beginning to develop me spiritually, to recognize that the Church of Jesus Christ was more than good times and parties and social events (then I was a young person). It was reaching out and caring for people. I, for example, got a notice this last week from the chaplain of Fairview State Hospital requesting me to announce within our congregation the need for people to volunteer at 1:30 on Sunday afternoons to push people to the chapel service, for the mentally retarded young people, children and adults at Fairview. The chaplain needs persons who will help him gather

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people out of their wards and push their wheelchair to the chapel and then remain there and be with them to take them back afterwards. If you're not, therefore, in a ministry where you're reaching out to people who cannot pay you back, be sure and let me know and I'll give you those specific times and the chaplain's name to contact and you can begin there.

Deepen your spiritual life through radical hospitality.

### **III. The third way to deepen our spiritual life as found in Luke 14 is the putting away of excuses.**

“When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.’ Jesus replied: ‘A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.” Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.” Still another said, “I just got married, so I can’t come.” The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” “Sir,” the servant said, “what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.””

Then the master told his servant, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet [referring to the early group who had declined on the basis of their excuses]””

(Luke 14:15–24, NIV).

Here, Jesus points us to that day which in the book of Revelation is called the wedding feast or the wedding supper of the Lamb. Here it's called the banquet of the kingdom of God. Blessed are

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those who are invited to this banquet. You and I have been invited to that banquet. My mind is rich in imagery when I focus on that future age. I have the Billy Graham photograph that was done so many years ago that has a beautifully set table with candelabra and the most exquisite china. The table reaches into infinity and disappears in the picture. As you look at it, there's a little phrase underneath it that says, "Come, for all things are ready." I see that and instantly see myself someday at a banquet like that. The banquet of God, which we will all enjoy, will be so large and yet it will be so intimate. I have this sense that although there are going to be countless numbers of people at the banquet, we're not going to feel like we're lost in the crowd. "Come, for all things are ready." What a wonderful day that will be.

A German preacher, commenting on the banquet of the kingdom of God, says that somehow this answers the deep yearning that someday the mystery of suffering, the mystery of madhouses, mass graves, the mystery of widows and orphans will be illuminated. Someday, the hereafter must come, when we must learn all the answers. Someday, the paralyzing contradiction between justice on the one hand and life's blind game of chance on the other hand must be reconciled. Someday, the tension between rich and poor, between the sunny side of life and the gloomy zones of horror must be equalized.

That day is coming in the great Marriage Supper of the lamb, the great banquet. What an honor to be invited. If you were to be invited this week to have dinner with the President at the White House, whether it was a large group or small group, you would feel very, very honored. In the Book of Revelation, there is, to one of the churches in Revelation, the promise that to them would not only be given a new name but they would be given a white stone. That's a very graphic description, because in those days, before the printing of tickets for anything—because they didn't have printing presses—the admission to important events such as a state occasion or

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a very important city banquet was to issue a specially designed white stone. So John, in writing Revelation, tells us that blessed are those who have the white stone, who have the admission ticket for the Messianic banquet.

How is the invitation to go out? The servants of the master were to send out the invitation. In those days, people didn't have clocks like we have today, with buzzers going off. The cooks didn't have refrigeration. So how would people know when the meal was ready? Every banquet that was important in those days had a two-stage invitation. The first was an invitation that went out some days in advance, to prepare you to come. Then, when the meal was ready by the cooks on the announced day, at the right time, again the messengers of the one giving the banquet went out to say, "Come now, everything is ready." Things didn't keep long because there was no refrigeration. You had to come when it was ready. The first invitation had gone out. So everyone had had adequate time to prepare to come. But when the second invitation goes out, then Jesus picks up the excuses and He is really talking about the reaction that He is getting from the religious leaders of His day and the people who have chosen not to respond to His invitation—the excuses are all bad. He gives three of them that He's been getting or that will be given also in that day.

One is the excuse of "I've bought a field and I need to go see it" (Luke 14:18). That excuse is so bad it hardly merits being used as an excuse. No one that I have ever known has bought a piece of property without looking at it. If they did, they were terribly remiss in their business dealings and probably have been bamboozled financially more than once. I have a bridge for sale for all of those people. So that's patently absurd, that a person would have bought a piece of property and not looked at it. But then, if a person had been so stupid as to do that, then why not wait

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another day before they go look at it? It is not that pressing that it has to be seen today. Jesus is using that as an illustration of the fact that the excuses that He has been given hold no water.

Then there's the man who has bought a team of oxen and he had not tried them out. Again, who would be so foolish as to go down to a used car lot (to put it in our language) and simply take whatever is there at whatever price, without driving it at least around the block or taking it to a mechanic for a checkup. But here is a person who has been so foolish as to use that as an excuse. The only halfway legitimate excuse was the guy who got married. Even his excuse doesn't hold, because in the Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 24), if you got married, you were exempted for one year from military service. I still think that's a marvelous safeguard for marriage of young people or older people during their first year of marriage, to spend significant time together to establish a good basis, a strong bond to one another. But the Old Testament never says anything about using marriage to get out of commitments that you have already made before you were married. The first invitation had already gone out. Now the second invitation came, and this excuse is being used.

Jesus is telling this story against His contemporaries. It's a story He is using to suggest to them that soon the invitation to come to the kingdom of God is going to go outside of Judaism. It's going to go outside of Israel. It is going to go into the streets and the alleys and the roads and the country lanes of the world. "And whosoever will," that person may come. It's going to go, as it so often does, to those who are reaching out without hope, because the gospel is always good news to the person who has no hope. To the lame and the crippled and the poor and the blind. I would take that to be either physically or spiritually descriptive of people. It is only when we sense our need for God and when we're poor and lame and crippled and blind that we will respond to the invitation of the kingdom of God. If we can make it on our own, we have no need

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to respond. The gospel is going to come out to those who sense their need. And when the message comes, then there's going to be with it a tremendous response. The problem with those people is that, because they live in out-of-the-way places and have never been invited to anything like this, they can scarcely believe it.

So that's why Jesus says, "Compel them." This, in the Middle Ages, was used as a text to take a club and coerce someone into baptism—compel them to come in. It isn't that kind of compelling. It's the compelling that says, "Insist to them that the invitation is legitimate and that the master really means business and that he invites you to his feast. Come!"

This raises then the question in our lives, as we try to apply it, as to whether or not we have ever given excuses for not fulfilling legitimate spiritual responsibilities which the Lord has called us to. Some of the excuses, which I have given or I have heard given are: "I'm too busy, that's not my line, that's not my gift." I thank the Lord that, in this era of the church, we have had a tremendous renewed emphasis on discovering your spiritual gift, but sometimes I have heard persons decline service to the Lord on the basis of, "That's not my gift," when, in fact, there is a certain kind of response that the Lord wants from all of us to fill any position. Maybe there's no one in the Body at that particular moment that can fill that to the giftedness we would like, and maybe we've been drafted as a utility infielder and our hearts always need to be willing and not excuse ourselves on the line that we don't have the ability. If God calls us, He'll equip us with the ability. Other excuses are, "Others are more able." Or, perhaps, "I'll do it later." Or, "What is someone else doing?"

Jesus says, "Go out and get people to come in. Then when you've gotten them all to come in, tell them yet there is room." That's really the job of the church, and I've appreciated so much what CIA and Ken and Ruth do to try to help us as a Body to be more equipped to go out and ask

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people and invite people to come in. It's the one thing that we have a lot of excuses for not doing, because it is a threatening and intimidating thing to go out and to ask people and to knock on doors. Jesus says, "Go do it. Let the invitation go out. Let people know that the invitation from Me is a serious one. When you get them all in, don't say it's all full. There is yet room."

The Book of Revelation tells us how much room there is. The measurements of the new Jerusalem that are given in Revelation 21:16 are 1,500 miles on each side. That means a city stretching from Los Angeles to Tulsa and from Tulsa up to the Canadian border, and from the Canadian border back through Washington and then back to LA—a pretty large city. But now I'm talking about just a flat plain. This city is tiered. It's a skyscraper city. It is as tall as it is broad and long. So it's not only 2,250,000 miles square on a plain. But then it's cubed and it goes up, so there's plenty of room in God's kingdom. And all the *Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars* movies that you have seen of things in space have not yet begun to approach the dynamic mystery and beauty of the city of God. There is room.

Jesus is saying to those who refuse the message: "There is coming a time—an awful time—when it will be too late to accept the invitation. Therefore come. You never know when it will be too late."

This week, I ran across a little quote from Billy Sunday that was given to me by a member of the congregation. He was talking about people who say, "I'm not going to become a Christian until the last minute. Just before I die, I know the Lord will give me a chance to give my life to Him." Billy Sunday said this in the 1920s: "I don't go much for these death bed confessions. A death bed confession is like burning a candle at both ends and then blowing the smoke in the face of Jesus. A deathbed confession is like drinking the cup of life and then offering the dregs to Christ. I think it's one of the most contemptible, miserable, low down, unmanly and unwomanly thing

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you can do. To keep your life in your own control until the last moment and then try to creep into the kingdom of God on account of the longsuffering and mercy of Jesus Christ. I don't say that none are genuine. But there is only one on record in the Bible and it was the first time the dying thief had ever heard of Christ, and he accepted at once. So your case is not analogous to his. You have wagonloads of sermons dumped into you. It's a mighty hard thing to accept Jesus in the last minute. If you've lived without conviction, your friends ought not to get too mad when the preacher preaches your funeral sermon and doesn't put you in the front row of heaven with a harp in your hands and a crown on your head. A doctor who had been a practitioner for sixty years was asked how many of the godless men he had treated had shown any signs of concern on their deathbeds. He said that of the three hundred, he had specifically kept track of only three that had shown what might be called concern over their souls. You ordinarily die as you have lived. Yet if you have a desire to be a Christian, it is proof that the devil hasn't got you yet. That is the comfort. Now for the warning. If you have that desire, thank God for it and yield to it. You may never have another chance." I can say, "Amen!" to Billy Sunday's experience. I have found that people who have served the Lord are ready for the Lord on their deathbed. And if people haven't, they don't want to talk about it and are generally not open, although thank God, there are exceptions.

The invitation is out and the response we're making right now in our life is going to determine our destiny.

Jesus calls us to lay aside any excuse in our life that is not a proper excuse. There are times when we're asked to do some things in the body of Christ and we have a legitimate reason, such as the prior obligation to our family, as to why we can't do them. We've sought to emphasize in this church that we would like wholeness in the Lord first, and family comes second. Many workers

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in the kingdom of God have burned out their own families because they have not taken time to minister to their families. So we're not suggesting that there is not proper rationale sometimes for not being involved in some element of God's work in a larger place.

But the Lord calls us to look seriously at the opportunities of life we're turning down. We've believed things about ourselves that are not true, such as, "We're not qualified, we're not capable, we're too busy, there are too many other things, there are other people to do it." People look around this church from time to time and say, "There are so many places to minister, and they all seem to be going so well. I don't really need to minister. I can kind of sit back and enjoy things." But that's not the case. There are so many opportunities to be involved in ministry.

A third way to grow deeper in our spiritual life is to lay aside excuses.

#### **IV. Then a fourth way to grow deeper in our spiritual life is to have loyalty to Jesus Christ above everything else.**

"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it

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### **Luke 14:1–35**

loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:25-35, NIV).

Notice in this little passage I have just read the three times the phrase “He cannot be my disciple” occurs. Each time it occurs, it marks a different area of loyalty that the Lord is asking in us.

**A.** The first area of loyalty He is asking in us is that our loyalty to Him be above even that of family. So He says, “He who does not hate his father and mother...” The word “hate” there does not mean active aggression against them. For Jesus taught us to show respect toward one another and forgiveness toward even our enemy. The word maybe is a little bit too strong in the English language. But it simply means that should we not place our family ahead of our loyalty to Jesus Christ. If we place family ahead of Christ, we cannot, therefore, be His disciple.

**B.** A second area of loyalty that He asks of us is loyalty to Him above adverse circumstances. “Carry your cross and follow Me.” Following Christ involves taking up responsibility. And as a Christian, being involved in those things which may not be pleasant and obligations we would not have were we not Christ’s people. But loyalty says, “We’ll be true to Him in the midst of those adverse circumstances.”

**C.** The third area of loyalty is loyalty to Jesus over the long stretch. Look at verse 33, which sums up verses 28–32. Loyalty to Jesus over the long stretch involves understanding the parables of the tower and the parables of the battle. No one is going to build a tower without sitting down first and considering the cost. Therefore, Jesus asks that a discipleship commitment to Him not be made on a whimsy or on a trial basis, or that it not simply come out of an emotion in our heart. But that, when we make a commitment of our life to Jesus the Lord, it be done with an intent to consider that we are going through with this decision all the way because our heart and mind are involved in it, and not just our emotions.

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### **Luke 14:1–35**

The two parables of the tower and battle differ a little bit. The builder of the tower is free to build or not build, as he may choose, but the king is not free because he is being invaded. In the first parable, the parable of the tower, Jesus is saying, “Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow Me.” In the second parable, He’s saying, ‘Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to refuse My demands.’ For in the second parable, it is the person who is outnumbered that decides whether they’re going to fight or not. So on the one hand, Jesus is saying, “Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow Me.” And then, He is turning right around and saying, “Sit down and reckon whether you can refuse My demands.”

### **Closing Prayer**

We have choices, in all of these matters, of a deeper spiritual life: choices in regards to whether we’re going to have a life based on legalism or Christ’s righteousness; choices in regards to practicing a life of humility and hospitality; choices to lay aside excuses in our life; and choices to determine whether or not we will be loyal to the Lord above all else. These choices will determine the extent of our saltiness and whether we season the community and world and family God has called us to season and preserve, or whether we ourselves, in the midst of the world in which we live, are invaded by its lifestyle and lose both our flavoring and our preserving qualities. So Jesus closes the message with a little phrase, “He who has ears to hear let him hear.” To grow deeper in your spiritual life, take what I’m saying to you to heart.