

"Total Dedication"

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Let's open our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, help us to be effective, dedicated disciples. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

Tony Campolo, in his book, *Red Letter Revolution* tells a story attributed to Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher-theologian, who said, "I went into a church in Copenhagen and sat on a cushioned pew. The velvet-robed minister opened a gilded Bible, marked the place for his reading with a satin marker, and, as the sunlight streamed through the stained glass windows behind him, he read, 'If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up the cross and follow me.'" Then Kierkegaard said, "I looked around the church and nobody was laughing!"

Dedicated discipleship requires sacrificial love; many Christians have demonstrated their dedicated discipleship with their lives.

Our gospel reading from Luke today, concludes the 14th chapter, during which, Jesus healed a man with dropsy, told parables of humility and hospitality, and today, in conclusion, Jesus sets out the total dedication required of the disciples who want to follow him. Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem where he will be crucified and he is trying to convey to his many followers the total dedication that will be required of them to truly follow him. They must carefully consider the role of disciple; not just idly follow along, nor follow out of impulse; but make a careful deliberate decision.

So Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." And later, "So therefore, none of you can become

my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” Jesus’ ethic of love makes it unthinkable that one should hate his or her own family and it seems a little irresponsible to give up all of one’s possessions. These are difficult demands for dedicated discipleship.

It took less than ten seconds, 9.63 seconds to be precise, for Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt to sprint the 100 meter distance on the Olympic track, win the gold medal and set a world record in London in 2012. Those few seconds cemented his status as the “fastest man alive.” Bolt has the first, second and third fastest recorded times at the 100 meter distance. He also holds the world record at the 200 meter distance. But his races were not won in those brief seconds – they were won by hours and hours of practice, workouts, weightlifting, special diet, and coaching. The races are won in the preparation; in the hours of Bolt’s focused sacrificial preparation; in meeting the difficult demands and high cost of total dedication.

Jesus wants his would-be disciples to carefully consider the difficult demands and high cost of total dedication. A prudent person would not begin a project until certain of the ability to finish it: a man would not lay the foundation for a tower unless he was sure he could complete the tower; a king would not go to war unless he had enough soldiers to win. The examples move from lesser to greater: from embarrassment, to defeat and loss of life. The redeeming spiritual implication is that God has not begun the process of redemption without being prepared to complete it and indeed, to win.

But, Jesus uses the word translated as “hate.” Ultimately, those who follow Jesus must be prepared to suffer the same fate as him – to bear their own cross. But, to obey the two great commandments: to love God and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, and then to hate your family and

even your own life doesn't fit. There are at least three contextual factors to consider. **First**, there's what's called "Semitic hyperbole," which is to exaggerate a contrast so much that the issue can be seen more clearly. It's like "I've told you a million times," or "the chocolate cake is to die for." The word hate, doesn't mean anger or hostility, but implies that if there's a conflict, our response to the demands of discipleship must take precedence. There is no duty higher than our commitment to Jesus and to being his disciple.

Second, as a practical consideration, the followers of Jesus were an itinerant band, travelling from place to place with Jesus. Early discipleship required a willingness to leave home and family and travel with minimal provisions from village to village. Christians are not all called to be itinerant.

Third, to give up your possessions is to share them. The disciples shared what they received while travelling from village to village and what they formerly owned was used and shared by their families and faith communities. Wealthy Christians often turned their homes into Christian gathering places for worship and communal meals. We love our neighbours and share with them.

Jesus knew from his own disciples about human failures. Judas, who betrayed Jesus is a good example, but so is Peter, who denied Jesus three times and yet was the rock upon which the church was built. Discipleship is a process, involving false starts, modest successes, and unsettling setbacks, as we live and grow in the fullness of our humanity on our journeys of faith. For at the heart of discipleship is transformation and being totally dedicated to Jesus is engaging in a profound, dedicated shift toward the love of God and love of neighbour: conscious, sacrificial love in all aspects of our daily living.

In Bob Greene's article, *From One Sufferer to Another*, published in the *Chicago Tribune*, he shares the story of 15 year-old Douglas Maurer of Creve Coeur, Missouri, who had been feeling bad for several days. His temperature was ranging between 103 and 105 degrees, and he was suffering from severe flu-like symptoms. Finally, his mother took him to the hospital in St. Louis. Douglas Maurer was diagnosed as having leukemia. The doctors told him in frank terms about his disease. They said that for the next three years, he would have to undergo chemotherapy. They didn't sugar coat the side effects. They told Douglas he would go bald and that his body would bloat. Upon learning this, he went into a deep depression. His aunt called a floral shop to send Douglas an arrangement of flowers. She told the clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who has leukemia.

When the flowers arrived at the hospital, they were beautiful. Douglas read the card from his aunt. Then he saw a second card. It said: "Douglas; I took your order. I work at Brix florist. I had leukemia when I was 7 years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good luck. My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley."

Douglas' face lit up. Douglas Maurer was in a hospital filled with millions of dollars of the most sophisticated medical equipment. He was being treated by expert doctors and nurses with medical training totaling in the hundreds of years. But it was a salesclerk in a flower shop, a young woman making \$170 a week, who, by taking the time to care, and by being willing to go with what her heart told her to do, gave Douglas hope and the will to carry on.

Fred Craddock, in an address to ministers, said "To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom – I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and

laying it on the table – ‘Here’s my life Lord. I’m giving it all.’ But the reality for most of us is that God sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbour kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost.’ Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn’t glorious. It’s done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it’s harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul.”

Laura Bradley’s note to 15 year-old Douglas Maurer was a 25 cent-er that made a huge difference in his life. As disciples of Christ, we’re called to dedicate our lives. The cost of total dedication is significant, but it’s measured in a lifelong supply of quarters. How many quarters can we give out today? Amen.