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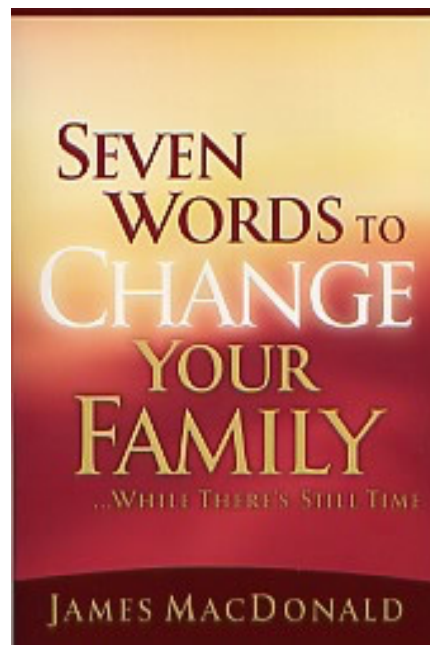
FOOTBALL & JESUS—FANS OR FOLLOWERS?

[WORD #6: COMMITMENT – LUKE 14:25-34]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JANUARY 6, 2008

FROM THE *MASTERWORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



FOOTBALL & JESUS—FANS OR FOLLOWERS?

[WORD #6: COMMITMENT –LUKE 14:25-34]



Often our priorities in life are mixed up. Recently, I saw a cartoon on the internet showing a woman crawling on her hands and knees in the desert. The sun was broiling her. There were two roads. One turned to the right, stating, "Fresh water only ¼ mile." The road to the left had a sign, stating, "One-half price sale only 2 and ¼ miles." GUESS WHICH ROAD SHE TOOK?

After Christmas, I heard someone repeat that famous question, **"Are you ready for some football!"** Since New Year's Eve I've counted 32 different bowl games—not to mention the NFL playoffs that started this weekend with the Wild Card games. All of this leads to the Super Bowl on February 3 in Arizona. I read that Super Bowl XLII will reach one billion people worldwide—where will you be? I must admit I truly love football. Football in South Carolina seems to be more than a sport—it's a way of life. Many here live football 365 days a year. It's almost like a religion, some say. In fact, we begin to indoctrinate our children with our football theology even before they come out of the womb. My daughter Amy recently found out she was having a boy next May, so for Christmas—four months before the baby is born—she buys a South Carolina Gamecock *onesey* outfit. In this state, early on in one's childhood, you must declare a team affiliation between Carolina or Clemson whether you want to or not. There seems to be no middle ground!

Football fans do crazy things. They pack up their RV's, vans, trucks and SUV's and head to the parking lot of their favorite ball team so that we can grill out and watch the game on television when they could have done that same thing at home on their own patio. Fans are finicky. When things are going good for the team we fill the stands and cheer them on. But, when the chips are down we criticize every play. We bad mouth the players and the coach. We talk about the way it used to be. Fans come in

frenzies. They feed on the excitement and vanish when the difficult times come.

The sad truth is that many Christians today resemble football fans. They rally around the excitement and they run from the work. They encourage in the good times and criticize when things are not going so well. They fill the pew and wait to be entertained.

Today, as we continue with the Sixth Word that can change your family from our study of Dr. MacDonald's book, we look at **COMMITMENT**. To be a follower of Christ takes a supreme commitment. This week we looked at some truths that help us determine our status as a Fan or Follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus understood this too.

Open your Bible to **LUKE 14:25-27 (NIV)** as we begin. Here we find Jesus on His way to Jerusalem and a crowd has gathered around Him. In fact the Bible says that "great multitudes" were all around Him. When Jesus saw these multitudes He turned and said to them in essence, "I'm not looking for fans; I'm looking for followers." Follow along as we begin reading verse 25: *²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:* *²⁶"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. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

How literally do you take "hate" in verse 26? **MATTHEW 10:37 (NIV)** says: *³⁷"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* Jesus is saying to us today what He said to those multitudes in His day. It's easy to be a fan. Fans are here today and gone tomorrow. Following takes commitment. Following takes sacrifice. There are those in church today who are fans of the preacher or a teacher. There are those who are even fans of Jesus, but they have never made the transition to become a FOLLOWER of Jesus. It is time to declare

your loyalty. It is time for you to decide if you're going to be a fan or a follower of Jesus Christ.

Listen to these three verses from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* paraphrase of **LUKE 14:25-27 (MSG)**, ²⁵⁻²⁷*One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's own self!—can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.*

Does that help you understand what Jesus is saying to us? Bottom line, if you come after me—if you want to be my follower—then you must love me more than any thing or any body in this universe. He is saying that when you compare your love for me and your love for every other relationship you have it should appear as though your love for me so out shines your love for any thing or any body else that it seems that you hate them in comparison to me. Do you recall what Jesus says is the Greatest Commandment? Listen to Jesus' words from **MARK 12:30 (NIV)**, ³⁰*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'*

Look again at LUKE 14:27, *Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.* How can you tell if someone is totally committed to something? Is there a difference between traveling with Jesus and being totally committed to Him? How can absolute commitment to Christ transform our families? Won't it tear them down instead? Remember the story of Abraham and his son Isaac from Genesis 22? (QUINCY STORY-Total Commitment)

Jesus warned the multitudes in our study this week to count the cost of discipleship. He used several illustrations of this in our text. It is important that those who would come to be followers of Christ understand the level of commitment that is required of them lest they enter only as a fan and fool themselves into

thinking that they are followers. How blinded are those who sit in our pews Sunday after Sunday thinking that they are followers of Christ when their level of commitment reveals that they are nothing more than fans. How dangerous is this state of mind when you think you are eternally ready only to find out that you came up short because you were not willing forsake all and follow Him.

Would you say it is fair to say that anything less than total, 100% commitment is disobedience? How far do you take this? Do you think God would rather have people not come to church at all if they are not committed to Him? John White (*Cost of Commitment*) wrote: *"All relationships, no matter how intimate, must be secondary to our relationship with Christ. To hate one's family means to be so committed to Christ that however much it costs me to be away from that circle, I must cut myself ruthlessly from its comfort and follow Him barefoot on rocky pathways."*

Jesus confirmed that there will be many who were merely fans rather than followers when He said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven."* **MATTHEW 7.21 NKJV** He also confirmed that there will be many revealed as merely fans painted up in the tapestry of Christianity when He said, *"many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness?'"* **MATTHEW 7.22-23 NKJV**

As Dr. MacDonald pointed out this week in our study, once we nail down that our top priority is Christ, we must determine that our next full commitment is to our families. Most of the passages we looked at this week seem to imply that we must ignore our families and focus on God. However, that's not true. God must be #1—He must have top priority. Turn to **1 TIMOTHY 5:8 (NLT)** and let's look at what Paul said in furtherance of this principle: *⁸But those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers.*

What we need to do, then, is to take the principles Jesus taught about commitment to Him and apply them also to making a total commitment to your families. Bottom line is that a total commitment to Christ will lead to a total commitment to family also. But there's a price.

In 1947, a professor at the University of Chicago was scheduled to teach an advanced seminar in astrophysics. At the time he was living in Wisconsin, doing research. He planned to commute twice a week for the class, even though it would be held during the harsh winter months. Registration for the seminar, however, fell far below expectations. Only two students signed up for the class. People expected the professor to cancel, lest he waste his time. But for the sake of two students, he taught the class, commuting 100 miles round trip through back country roads in the dead of winter. His students did their homework. Ten years later, in 1957, they both won the Nobel prize for physics. So did the professor in 1983. God doesn't need large numbers only a committed few. There is a cost in being committed to God.

Total commitment to my family is pretty hard and will not come without a price, so we have to make sure that the cost of our commitment has been calculated. We know we are to carry our own cross according to verse 27 of Luke 14. The cross in this verse is symbolic of the hardships related to following Christ. Look at **LUKE 14:28-30 (NIV)** now and let's see Jesus' illustration of what He is talking about calculating the cost: ²⁸"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? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

Simply, can I finish the course? Can I follow Christ to the end? Can I be a faithful husband for my whole life? Can you be the wife God has called you to be? Am I willing to pay the price of godly parenting? Commitment is the defining characteristic of life,

according to Dr. MacDonald. What are the costs of being fully committed to family? Why do families break their commitments?

George Barna concludes in an article called The American Witness that Christians are just as likely as non-Christians to divorce, buy a lottery ticket, and even watch X rated movies as non-Christians. Addressing a national seminar of Southern Baptist leaders, George Gallup said, "We find there is very little difference in ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously...The levels of lying, cheating, and stealing are remarkably similar in both groups. Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fewer still could recall five of the Ten Commandments. Only two in ten said they would be willing to suffer for their faith.

Open your Bible to **LUKE 9:57-62 (NLT)** and let's review the three reasons we studied about this week as to why families break their commitments. **REASON #1** is that **people don't count the cost ahead of time.** *⁵⁷As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."* That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? If a guy like that shows up at the church, they're like, "Sign him up." And he will be up giving his testimony in three weeks. But, what do people mean when they get married if not that they are committed to each other for life?

Look at Jesus' response in verse **58**: *⁵⁸But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."* What's He saying here? Simply, it's, "Hey, dude, you don't know what you're talking about. You haven't counted the cost. Are you going to follow me wherever I go? Do you know where I go? Maybe you're at a point where your commitment to your family is costing you a lot. Maybe your marriage is taking a lot more energy than it has at other times. Maybe you're carrying a heavy burden for one of your children and you're wondering if keeping your commitment is really worth all that it's costing you. Don't give up! The power

that comes on the other side of commitment is incredible, but the pain that comes from breaking your family commitments is something from which few people ever recover.

Listen to these words about commitment and what it means to be totally committed to Christ from **GALATIANS 2:20 (NLT)**, ²⁰*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* When you've died with Christ, you're willing to carry those family burdens, endure anything for their sake, and continue to do them good even when times are tough.

This week I read an article that Chuck Swindoll had clipped from the local newspaper in Los Angeles about a man named David Berg. *This man walked into the hospital looking like an advertisement for a health club. He was twenty-two years old, 6 feet 4 inches tall, and weighed two hundred five pounds. He had been running and working out daily with weights. In just a month, he was scheduled to begin his senior year at the University of South Dakota, where he was an honor student in the field of biology. He wanted to become a veterinarian. The last few days of his summer vacation, he planned an elective surgery at the hospital to take care of a nagging groin problem. It was considered such a routine procedure that the doctor told him, "Don't worry! You'll be camping again in no time." He had planned a trip for two weeks later, but he never made it.*

These days, David Berg lies in a hospital room in Inglewood, California, looking pale and fragile. At one hundred twenty-five pounds, he is so weak that he can no longer sit up in bed. Heavily sedated to control muscle spasms, Berg lies flat on his back and gazes with seemingly frightened blue eyes at a world his neurologist says is only a blur to him....

Every six hours, a nurse interrupts the monotony by connecting a thin, plastic tie tube to an opening in his

stomach so that he can be fed some liquid. When he soils his diapers, he must lie in them until a nurse comes because he is mute and can communicate only by small gestures such as blinking his eyes...An error in administering an anesthetic deprived Berg of oxygen for about twenty minutes and left him with severe brain damage.

At the age of sixty-three, his father gave up his Brentwood law practice to take care of David, and he is the most frequent visitor in the hospital. David's father "said that unlike someone in a coma, his son is worse off because he is fully aware of his plight. He added that for a parent the death of a child would be easier to take. 'With death come finality, and the memory grows dimmer. The essence of this tragedy is a continuing one. It goes on and on and on.'"

None of us know what is around the corner. You may be called upon to do something that at the moment you can't imagine, like David's father surrendering his career to help his ailing son. It's times like this you press on and push forward, drawing upon the Lord's strength to keep the commitments you have made to your family.

REASON #2 is the price is not paid during hardship. Look at **LUKE 9:59-60 (NLT)**, *⁵⁹He said to another person, "Come, follow me." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." ⁶⁰But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."*

That seems like a reasonable request, *"Let me go and bury my father."* This was a big deal for Jewish people and was a supreme duty. But, the reason this was rejected by Jesus was because of his first four words, *"Lord, first let me."* Even the greatest of human obligations doesn't work. It can't be, *"Lord, ME first."* In a similar way, no human activity or responsibility should interfere with my family: not work, not leisure, not friends, not education. *Can you think of a hardship that would cause you to give up your commitment to your family?*

If you've been following the news at all lately, perhaps you've read or seen what's happening in the life of Brittany Spears, or maybe even her sixteen year old sister. What picture does their lifestyle portray about commitment?

It's not always easy to be a mother or a father. It's not always easy to be a faithful spouse. But the price must be paid, even during hardship. If not, the commitment will break down.

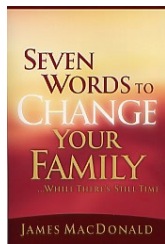
REASON #3 as to why families break their commitments is the course is not finished! Look at **LUKE 9:61-62**, ⁶¹*Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family."* ⁶²*But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."* That is commitment to God's Kingdom. Keep your hand on the wheel—we're not looking back. We are not going backward. This is what we committed ourselves to do and we are going to keep on doing it for the rest of our lives. Finish the course! What tempts us not to finish the race? Look at what Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, in **1 TIMOTHY 4:7 (NLT)**, ⁷*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful."*

Dr. MacDonald gave us four words to help sharpen our family commitment on Day Five (Page 74) of our study this week: Consecrate, Communicate, Cooperate, and Christ. If you didn't commit these words to memory for use later, please go back and learn them.

On April 21, 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez sailed into the harbor of Vera Cruz, Mexico. He brought with him only about 600 men, and yet over the next two years his vastly outnumbered forces were able to defeat Montezuma and all the warriors of the Aztec empire, making Cortez the conqueror of all Mexico. How was this incredible feat accomplished, when two prior expeditions had failed even to establish a colony on Mexican soil? Here's the secret. Cortez knew from the very beginning that he and his men faced incredible odds. He knew that the road before them would be dangerous and difficult. He knew that his

men would be tempted to abandon their quest and return to Spain. And so, as soon as Cortez and his men had come ashore and unloaded their provisions, he ordered their entire fleet of eleven ships destroyed. His men stood on the shore and watched as their only possibility of retreat burned and sank. And from that point on, they knew beyond any doubt there was no return, no turning back. Nothing lay behind them but empty ocean. Their only option was to go forward, to conquer or die.

Are you a person truly committed to honoring who you are? Is that the way your family, your God and others describe you right now? Let's Pray!



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