

# Giving It Up for Others

Luke 9:23-25

1) Ernest Henry Shackleton was born on February 15, 1874, in Ireland. While Shackleton was still young, the family moved to London where Shackleton was educated. Ernest's father wanted him to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor. Instead, Shackleton joined the merchant navy at the age of sixteen. As a sailor, he traveled to many places, but his great desire was to travel to the North and South Poles.

In December of 1914, Shackleton finally set sail for the South Pole in command of the ship *Endurance*. He took with him a crew of twenty-seven men, many of whom had answered the following recruitment notice Shackleton placed in the newspaper:

*Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.*

So many men responded to the ad that Shackleton had to turn away more than a few!

2) Long before Shackleton, Jesus gave the most remarkable recruitment invitation the world has ever heard. He said,  
***"If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his own life for my sake will save it."***  
(Luke 9:23-24)

Jesus never tried to win disciples by making it sound easy. He lets us know up front that it is a commitment that will cost you something. You cannot just say you love the Lord. Discipleship is dynamic, not static. You must show it as your heart's devotion transcends to your hands and feet.

Jesus desires us to understand that being a Christian is not just about sitting in a pew or saying a prayer. We must be Christians more than just on Sunday mornings.

It is about a life committed, a life changed, a heart and will surrendered, and a new direction and worldview with His precepts and character for living as our example.

Discipleship is costly because Jesus must have priority over our wills, ideas, plans, and presumptions. Being a true disciple means having a willingness to trust Him completely in all aspects of life from the highest highs to the lowest lows. Remember, we are to trust Him even when we do not know, like, or understand, and also when He is leading through unpopular territory. Being a true disciple allows us to put our hand to the plow and not look back.

3) Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent and our focus is the fourth practice of fruitful congregations – Risk-Taking Mission and Service. Notice I didn't say mission and service. I said risk-taking mission and service. The kind of service and mission that pushes people to do things that you only do because you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

a. We are called to Risk-Taking Mission and Service because of what is opposite Risk-Taking – things like safe, predictable, comfortable, certain, convenient – words that do not describe the ministry of Jesus who said,

***"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."***

(Luke 9:24)

b. Jesus was a risk-taker. He wasn't safe, or predictable, comfortable, or convenient. He got his hands dirty, he shared God's love with those who were on the edges of society, those no one else would help, those who needed help, not just those it was easy for him to help.

When Jesus came to announce the purpose of his ministry in Luke 4 he talked about his risk-taking mission:

***"The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*** (Luke 4:18-19)

c. Is there anything in the nature or character of God that leads you to believe that being safe and comfortable would be the norm for God's followers? There is always a risk of some kind when God calls. God doesn't appear to be terribly interested in making sure we feel comfortable. As John Ortberg says, "God would not make a good flight attendant."

Whenever God calls someone to do something in scripture, rarely is the response, "Wonderful! What an opportunity! Fabulous! What a great challenge!" No, almost always the response is fear.

4) So what is God calling us to do?

a. At the heart of what God calls all of us to do is to be bearers of the good news of the gospel. And what is the good news of the Gospel? The Gospel is that in Christ, God is on a mission recreating, renewing, reconciling, and restoring a broken and fallen world. And we are invited to join God in that mission.

b. We are called to Risk-Taking ministries that push us out of our comfort zones to make a real difference in the lives of people. Ministries that require hands-on, face-to-face engagement with the needs of people we might ordinarily not come to know.

- Outreach ministries that impact the lives of people in our community who are not a part of our church.
- Service and friendship to those in our community who have the least power – the poor, the unemployed, the stranger, the hungry, the homeless, the abused, the addicted, the immigrant, the victim of violence.

c. As followers of Christ, we cannot live as if these things have nothing to do with us. Christ moves us closer to suffering, not farther away. We cannot walk around oblivious to suffering, ignoring it and denying it like those who preceded the Samaritan down the road to Jericho. We can't moan about how somebody ought to do something. We cannot just pray for those who suffer, asking God to do for us what God created us to do for God.

5) The questions we must always be asking are: "What is God calling us to do?" "Where is God calling us?" When you look at the stories in scripture of God calling people to do something, there is a pattern.

a. There is a calling to a task:

- "Moses, go tell Pharaoh to let my people go and lead them out of Egypt across the wilderness toward the Promised Land."
- And when Moses dies, God comes to Joshua and says: "Joshua, Moses is dead. I need you to lead my people out of the wilderness into the Promised Land." God didn't tell Joshua just to pray about it. He told him to be strong and courageous.

We have to be courageous enough to do something.

b. Following the call to a task, there is almost always an objection by the one being called.

- Moses says he can't approach Pharaoh because he's not a good speaker.

He is like many of the other prophets who are called by God. They don't want to do it because they feel they can't. They don't believe they have the resources to do what God is calling them to do.

c. But we can never determine our response to God's calling based on the resources we have. "What are our resources?" is not the question to ask. The questions to ask are: "What is God calling us to do? Where is God leading us?" And as we follow God's leading it's up to God to provide the resources. Moses, Joshua and all the great saints of the Bible were afraid their resources would not match God's calling. But it is the testimony of God's people that God did provide what they needed.

Take this to heart:

**Jesus never asked anyone to do anything without enabling them to do it.**

d. And what God called them to do was often bold and costly. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews describes people who said yes to God: ***"Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them."*** (Hebrews 11:36-38a)

6) Too often the church replaces Risk-Taking Mission and Service with charity. Charity is what we do for ourselves in order to make ourselves feel good.

- Risk-Taking Mission and Service is what we do for others because we, the church, exist for others.
- Risk-taking mission and service is the willingness to do something that makes us feel uncomfortable so that we can reach out and share God's love with people who are in need outside of our immediate circle of concern.

Doing risk-taking mission and service isn't just a nice thing for us Christians to do. It's something that we must do. It is the very reason why God has put us here. The church will die without mission – maybe not overnight, but it will die – slowly and surely.

We are called to give it up for others, because every day that we feel too afraid to take a risk for the sake of Christ's mission in the world is a day that we give up a little bit of the life that God wants for us.

7) Risk-Taking Mission and Service comes with no guarantees. Much of our hardest work may have little visible impact or may seem to end in utter failure.

- a. Christ's ministry requires our willingness to risk . . . even failure.
- Sometimes alcoholics we help will return to their addictions.
  - Children we remove from violent homes run away again.
  - Homes we build are destroyed by the next flood, or fall back into disrepair from neglect of their owners.
  - Youth we support with scholarships drop out after two years.
  - And ex-cons we take a chance on end up back in prison.

Like the seeds scattered by Jesus' sower that land on rocky ground, get choked by weeds, or gobbled by birds – many of our finest efforts come to no visible good. But like Jesus' parable promises, as we remain faithful to the task, a harvest comes forth in miraculous ways.

b. Christ's calls us out of our comfort zones to a life of adventure – a life of Risk-Taking Mission and Service. Let me now ask a simple question:

**What have you done in the last 6 months that has helped the cause or status of another human being that you would not have done if Jesus were not the center of your life?**

c. John F. Kennedy, following a 1961 visit to an obscure orphanage in Calcutta wrote the sister in charge: "How do you plan to succeed in your efforts, for the needs are so great?" To which the humble sister replied: "God has not called me to be successful, but to be faithful."

That reminder from Mother Teresa ought to inspire all of us, for that is our calling card and those are our marching orders. Failure is certainly an option. Doing nothing is not! Amen!