

WEEK 34 DAY 1

Today's Reading: Luke 14:25-34

The Cost of Following Jesus

As women, we do this thing where we juggle everything on our calendar and then some! Activities for the kids, work meetings, household chores, relationships, and - all of a sudden - keeping our life in balance becomes very tricky. My grandparents always said, "If you want to do something new, something has to give." That was their motto, and they were wiser for sticking to it.

The same principle applies to our relationship with Christ. We cannot live a life that requires us to juggle the world alongside our eternal destination. Something in our lives must give for us to wholeheartedly follow Jesus. Scripture gives us a good place to start: worldly desires, passions, or secret sin should be confessed and shunned in order to follow Jesus with our whole being. We are to shed our worldly desires and grow closer to Christ. Practically, as believers, this means we are to deny our nature and choose to follow the Holy Spirit inside us. This will mean sometimes sacrificing friendships, relationships or even jobs in order to follow Christ fully.

1. In what areas of your life do you need to prioritize your walk with Christ?
2. Can you think of examples in the Bible where it cost something to follow Jesus?

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your Holy Spirit. May I grow in reliance on Him and be bold as I deny my nature to follow Yours.

WEEK 34 DAY 2

Today's Reading: Luke 15:1-7

Have you ever felt worn down by the obstacles in your life? We can feel this more often than we'd like to admit. In those moments, anxiety starts to spike, and fear starts to take over. We might be tempted to scroll through social media during those moments, instead of opening our Bible and talking to God. If we aren't careful, it's easy to become confused and wander away from God. Today we are reminded in Scripture that God is our Good Shepherd, and He cares for lost sheep like us.

It's tempting to look at a flock of sheep and place more value on the flock, as a whole, than an individual sheep. But God's ways are not man's ways. Our Good Shepherd values lost sheep, so much that He is willing to leave the flock and rescue the one. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." He knows that the 99 are resting and at peace. He knows each sheep individually, and He knows they are safe. Most importantly, Jesus knows that we are lost and need His help. Think of someone you love dearly. If that person went missing, you would do everything possible to find him or her. You would feel as if part of you were missing, unable to even enjoy life because your loved one was missing. That must be how Jesus feels when one of us wanders off.

Often, we find it hard to return home to the Shepherd because of our pain, embarrassment, or the consequences of our choices. But Jesus tells us He will not rest until He brings us home. It is in these times we must realize God's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). God will never turn us away or reject us (Deuteronomy 31:8).

He will never stop loving us (Romans 8:39). He longs for our restoration. We are so precious to Him that He will leave the 99 to find the one who wandered away.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for allowing me to be precious in Your sight. I love you.

Bonus Reading: Matthew 18:12-14

WEEK 34 DAY 3

Today's Reading: Luke 15:8-10

We can all think of people in our family or our lives who do not know Christ. It is easy to look at them and pity them or even be frustrated by their actions. Maybe you have been guilty of limiting your interactions with them because dismissing them is easier than loving them. However, there is a problem: That is not how the Father loves you or that unbeliever in your life.

As you have just read in the Parable of the Lost Coin, a woman desperately seeks her lost coin. It seems ridiculous to a modern audience why she would look so feverishly for a coin (something easily replaceable). However, during this time, women wore a string of 10 coins across their heads to symbolize their new marriage. These coins often took a long time to collect because of their worth.

Therefore, this woman was looking for the equivalent of a diamond from her engagement ring.

Once the woman finds the coin, she invites all her friends over to celebrate, which Jesus compares to the angels who celebrate one repentant sinner. Therefore, God the Father is searching feverishly for your lost friends or family members. He is desperate to find them because they have enormous value to Him. Just as the woman looked for her lost coin, God is looking for His lost son or daughter. In the same way, this is how He looked for you before you came to Christ, and because you are now in Him, you must now have the same heart for those who are lost, just as the Father does.

•Have you shown the love of God to those in your life who do not know Christ? If so, how? If not, why?

PRAYER:

Use this time to pray for the unbelievers in your life. Ask God to show them how valuable they are in His eyes..

Bonus Reading: John 21:15-19

WEEK 34 DAY 4

Today's Reading: Luke 15:11-31

Jesus was surrounded by tax collectors, sinners and Pharisees. He chose to teach them about their hearts and His character by sharing parables: one with a lost sheep, one with a lost coin, and today we read of one with a lost son. Jesus increased the value of the lost items to emphasize their worth.

As the parable reads, there were two sons. The younger son disrespected his father and went his own way. He wanted to be the authority to determine on his own what was good, fun and pleasurable. He quickly realized the temporary satisfaction in what he thought would fulfill him. He found himself desperate. He decided to return to his father and ask for forgiveness. When he returned to his father's house, his father greeted him with mercy and grace. His father restored him to an honorable place in his house and celebrated his return.

The older son, however, grew bitter toward his father's kind forgiveness, giving in to pride and envy. The father explained to the older son that the blessing for his faithfulness was being present with the father. The father wanted to celebrate the return of the son who had left him for a time.

In this parable, tax collectors and sinners could identify with the younger son and be encouraged by the heavenly Father's mercy and grace. The Pharisees could identify with the older son, as Jesus challenged them to lay aside their pride and remember to put the kingdom of God first.

1. In what times/ways can you identify with the younger son? The older son?
2. How does God's character revealed in this passage encourage you to run toward Him instead of away from Him?

PRAYER:

Father, help us remember Your faithful forgiveness when we fall short. Help us run to You instead of from You.

WEEK 34 DAY 5

Today's Reading: Luke 16:1-13

We probably all remember hearing this adage, "Honesty is the best policy!" It's far more beneficial to tell the truth than a lie, no matter the consequences. Jesus uses The Parable of the Dishonest Manager to illustrate that trustworthy and honest stewardship glorifies our Father in heaven.

The parable we read today followed the story of a manager, or steward, who cheated his boss out of his possessions and money. When the manager realized he was out of a job, he fed off the generosity and kindness of his boss's debtors so they would be inclined to return him favors. His boss asked him to "Give an account of (his) stewardship...", and his poor management was exposed.

At the end of our lives, we will also be asked to give an account (Romans 14:12) - an account of how we stewarded our possessions, money, time, talents and so on. God wants us to use what He has given us for the glory of His kingdom - to submit everything to His will.

Of the many parables Jesus used, this one is tough to understand. Jesus used a dishonest man to be an example for His disciples; showing that sometimes God will use something familiar to us to clarify a point without commending the thing itself. This parable is a radical call to proper biblical stewardship in an age of selfish ambition and deceit.

Throughout Scripture, Jesus says His followers need to be humble: gentle, kind, forgiving. In Matthew 18, Jesus said we should be humble like little children. He even told us ways in which He, as the Messiah, was humble. In John 13, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples.

·In what ways can we, as Christ-following women, practice humility?

PRAYER:

God, You are our Master, and our wealth is at Your disposal. We praise You for the many things You have given us and for being our ultimate provider.

Bonus Reading: Matthew 6:19-21

WEEK 34 DAY 6

Today's Reading: Luke 16:14-16

A TV show presenting "magic" was on the other evening. The entire premise of the show was based on illusion: Things are not as they appear. This can be entertaining when you're watching television, but it is dangerous in real life when people mask who they really are. Perhaps you try to believe the best of people but find it's disappointing when they turn out to be someone other than whom they appear.

The Pharisees were supposed to be men who led people to God. Instead, they were often described as lovers of money and power that exceeded their devotion to God. They did things that made themselves look good to men, but God knew their hearts, and it was revolting to Him.

God will not be mocked, by those who deny or oppose Him, or by those who claim to represent Him!

In the Old Testament, the promise of the coming Messiah (Savior) was first given in Genesis, then through the Law and Prophets. When John the Baptist stepped onto the scene, he proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus made the lame walk, the blind see, and the leper clean. He was the promised Messiah, who came to fulfill the law.

When Paul and Silas proclaimed the Gospel in Berea, the people's response was to "examine the scriptures." Jesus revealed He was the Promised One to the woman at the well in Samaria.

She responded by telling her village, "Come and see ... can this be the Christ?" And when people saw for themselves, they believed in him in Samaria and Berea.

Our challenge is to be like the people in Berea and study Scripture. Because we have met Jesus, let us, also, be like the women in Samaria and invite others to "come and see...."

·Whom can you tell about Jesus today?

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that You are who You say You are.

**Bonus Reading: Matthew 5:17;
John 1:29, 45; 4:29, 39-42; Acts
17:10; Luke 7:20-23; Hebrews 13:8**