

sermon study guide

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Press On: Avoiding Shortcuts

Ashwin Ramani

IN - PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. When facing a difficult decision, do you tend to take your time and list out the pros and cons, or simply “go with your gut”?
2. Have you ever tried to take a shortcut in life? A get rich quick scheme or a shortcut to lose weight or something else? What was the result?

UP - PURSUE GOD

Read Matthew 16:21-28

3. Why did Peter take Jesus aside and rebuke him in verse 22? Why was Jesus’ response so strong (v. 23)?
4. What are the ‘terms and conditions’ of discipleship in verses 24-28? What incentives does Jesus present to encourage His disciples to stay the course?

OUT - PURSUE MISSION

5. Pastor Ashwin highlighted how our culture idolizes self, comfort, the easy path, and shortcuts. Which of these poses the biggest threat to you right now? Using wisdom from the Scriptures, how can you prepare a defensive strategy for yourself against this trap?
6. Who is someone you can partner with for mutual encouragement to ‘deny yourself and take up the cross’? What could this encouragement look like?

For Personal Reflection/Prayer:

Are there any areas of your life where you are taking a shortcut that you need to surrender to Jesus’ Lordship? Ask the Lord to give you strength to faithfully complete the course. Pray for others to help you along in the journey.

THE WORD (NIV)

Matthew 16:21-28

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

28 “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

sermon study summary

Press On: Avoiding Shortcuts

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Discipleship is not a sprint but a marathon. When Jesus invites us to 'Follow Him', He is not suggesting a short walk in the park but a demanding, lifelong commitment in which there are no short-cuts. Short-cuts – especially in our Christian walk - may seem attractive at the time, but like a 'bus trap' they invariably spell longer delays in our faith journey. It is something we must constantly guard against. Being derailed by easy path choices is a danger to a Christian at any time in their walk (1 Cor 10:12). We must ever remain 'in Christ' to hope to overcome these pitfalls.

In Matthew's Gospel, Satan intervened in Jesus' life at three pivotal turning points in an attempt to hinder God's plans. He did so immediately after His baptism by tempting Jesus, and lastly in the Garden of Gethsemane where Satan tried to tempt Jesus to keep Him from the cross. The other time was at Caesarea Philippi. Each time Satan urged Jesus to take a short-cut and bypass God's plans. Here in Matthew 16:21-28, the temptation was for Jesus to take the easier route, avoiding the cross. Jesus knew there was no short-cut to glory; he needed to endure the cross. We too must be wary of a cookie-cutter gospel that takes only the blessings while ignoring the message of sacrifice and the cost of discipleship.

Previously in Matthew 16, Peter, acting as the spokesman for the disciples, declared through the Holy Spirit at idol-infested Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Christ. In the very next section (Matthew 16:21-28) Peter's words were inspired by Satan himself. Jesus had been explaining to His disciples that he must die on the cross at Jerusalem. This was not an option. But it didn't match the Messianic ideals of the day that spoke of the Messiah as a conqueror rather than a suffering servant. Peter used strong language similar to Jesus' words when commanding evil spirits to depart or rebuking the wind and waves. Jesus' reply was just as startling (v. 23).

Jesus clearly sets out the message of what it means to be a disciple (v. 24). Just as Jesus 'must' go to Jerusalem to die, a disciple of Jesus 'must' deny themselves and take up the cross and follow Him. This was not an appealing call but a morbid declaration. Today the easy path to satisfy the self is rampant, feeding our natural inclination to selfishness. Jesus' call is to turn from this idolatrous self-centeredness and surrender to His Lordship. As we follow that call we will be tempted to take short-cuts. There we must choose: short-cut and compromise or take the path of obedience. Peter's response was not out of a wrong motivation – he wanted to protect Jesus. But it didn't make it right. In the same way, God's will for your life may not conform to popular opinion that can come from friends or even mentors.

Additionally, Jesus takes aim at our inclination toward accomplishments, titles and possessions (vv. 25-26) by pointing to the final judgment. He stresses that this life is only an introduction to eternity and urges us to place our priorities in the right direction – honoring Him and making him the center and driving force in our lives. There are future, eternal rewards (1 Cor 2:9) for lives so lived (Matt 16:27-28); rewards gained through short-cuts are temporary, fleeting. Don't waste your life on frivolous things but live wholeheartedly for Jesus. Life is short. Live it for Jesus. Avoid the lure of short-cuts. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus.