

**Luke 9:57–62**  
*Thoughts on Being a Disciple of Yeshua*

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*notes by Tim Hegg*

It is important to have the previous context in mind in order to properly understand the text we are studying. In the paragraph that proceeds our chosen section, beginning with v. 46, Yeshua is telling His disciples of His approaching suffering and death. He does so as they are arguing with each other about their own importance.

An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest. (Lk 9:46)

It appears that they were anticipating the soon arrival of “the kingdom” in which Yeshua would be the recognized Sovereign and King. With this in mind, it appears that they were arguing about who would be “second in command,” and what position of authority and honor each of them would hold. While Matthew (18:1) and Mark (9:33) give the setting of this event, Luke’s lack of a setting enables him to show the stark contrast between the betrayal and agony Yeshua was about to experience and the disciples’ self-focus.

But Yeshua, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.” (Lk 9:47–48)

The illustration Yeshua uses has an obvious lesson. First, it is significant that Yeshua knew what they “were thinking in their heart,” i.e., what the true motivation was for their dialoguing together. Then He takes a small child, eventually holding the child in His arms (cf. Mk 9:36), and uses the young child to illustrate someone who is even yet to learn some of the most important truths of life, i.e., someone who, in terms of intellectual acumen and life achievements, is “least.” The lesson Yeshua teaches is obvious: “the one who is least” is the person who focuses their attention on the needs of others and is not self-absorbed on his or her own needs. Even as Yeshua held the child, so the those who are His disciples should make it their focus to care about others rather than focusing their concerns upon themselves, seeking self-advancement.

Another lesson we learn from Yeshua’s illustration with a young child

is this:

Jesus' illustration prohibits all comparison between the disciples. Nowhere does He declare that someone is the greatest. Rather, He speaks simply of greatness. Greatness can be possessed and pursued, but not through comparison.<sup>1</sup>

In vs. 49–56, Luke relates how Yeshua was determined to go to Jerusalem since the days leading to His ascension were approaching. He sent a messenger ahead of Him to make arrangements for housing. They entered a village of the Samaritans but they would not receive Him because He was on His way to Jerusalem. Then the disciples ask Yeshua:

Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Lk 9:54)

But Yeshua "turns and rebukes them" for such a thought. Some later manuscripts have added these words:

and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Then they headed toward another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Yeshua said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Lk 9:57–58)

Nothing is given to us in the text to indicate who the individual was who promised to follow Yeshua "wherever You go." Yeshua's answer gives us an obvious and important lesson. Perhaps the individual who made this claim had seen and/or heard of Yeshua's miracles and thought that becoming a close companion of the "Miracle Worker" would bring him power, fame, and wealth. Yeshua lets him know that becoming one of His disciples by no means is a guarantee to worldly prestige, power, or wealth. This does not mean, as some have taught, that a true disciple of Yeshua will be impoverished. Rather, the emphasis of Yeshua's words is that one should not think that giving oneself to be a disciple of Yeshua guarantees wealth or a prestigious position in one's society. Rather, even as Yeshua

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1 Darrell Bock, *Luke*, in *BECNT* (Baker Books, 1994), 1.895.

came to serve and not be served, so all who are His true disciples must commit themselves to seeking the good of others and not try to use “religion” in a selfish manner, as though one’s religious fervor guarantees an inevitable path to wealth and prosperity.

And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:59–60)

At first reading, this response of Yeshua seems harsh and out of character. Surely the burying of one’s family member, and especially one’s parent, is an important duty and one that honors the Lord. But it seems reasonable that in this case, the man’s father had not actually died, but perhaps was older or even sickly. Indeed, if the man’s father had died, why would he be walking about on the same road that Yeshua and His disciples were on? Thus the request to “first go and bury my father” would mean to wait for an undetermined time until his father expired and then, after the burial, become a follower of Yeshua. Ultimately, the point of Yeshua’s response is that to be a true disciple of Yeshua means to put Him first in one’s life, and to give Him priority in terms of determining how one would order life’s choices and priorities.

What is more, attending to the needs of his father did not prohibit him from “proclaiming everywhere the kingdom of God.” Even in life’s various exigencies, the true believer is enabled to be a witness of God’s grace in Yeshua and to be known as one who worships the King.

Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” (Lk 9:61)

Here again, Yeshua is surely not teaching us that one’s obligation to one’s family is jettisoned when a person becomes one of His disciples. Rather, once again Yeshua is emphasizing the need to have one’s priorities well established so that in the event that one is unable to accomplish all that might be required, he or she is able to make sure that which has the highest priority is accomplished first. When attending to the most important aspects of life become more and more difficult and burdensome, it is often the case that a person reorders their priorities in terms of those that are less difficult. That is, when the going gets tough, it is easy to change courses.

This is made clear by Yeshua’s word in the following verse, v. 62.

But Yeshua said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”  
(Lk 9:62)

Putting one’s hand to the plow represents a commitment to do the work and to complete it properly. The metaphor is proverbial. When plowing one must keep one’s eyes looking ahead if one is to plow a straight furrow. But why would one “look back?” It must refer to longing to go back to the house or barn, that is, to stop the difficult work before it is finished. In other words, the point of the metaphor is that one who is the true disciple of Yeshua will persevere even when to do so presents great difficulties. That is, perseverance is the mark of a true disciple of Yeshua.

But we must also remember that perserverance does not indicate that one never falters. A good example is that of Peter, for though he stumbled under the weight of what he considered to be inevitable persecution, nevertheless he repented and was restored. Perseverance in the faith includes the gift of repentance when one has failed and needs to be restored. “Persevere we must, persevere we will!”

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord. (Rom 8:37–39)