

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-11-25—FOLLOW CHRIST

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

There are a few Scriptures that almost roll off the tongue. Here is one such verse:

JOHN 6:44 “No one can come to Me [*Jesus Christ*] unless **the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up at the last day.

The Greek word translated *draw* literally means to *drag*. When something is dragged, it is **forcibly moved**. To draw someone is the act of moving them from one place to another either because they cannot or will not on their own. To emphasize the power of God that is involved when He calls someone, notice the record of Peter, Andrew, James, and John:

LUKE 5:1-11 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him [*Jesus Christ*] to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing *their* nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, **they forsook all and followed Him**.

Jesus also approached Matthew in a similar manner:

MATTHEW 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “**Follow Me**.” So **he arose and followed Him**.

Imagine being at work, perhaps in an office with other people, when a man no one has ever seen before walks over to someone’s desk and simply says, “Follow me.” You watch as the person stops typing or puts down the phone and simply follows him out of the office. When this is put into a modern context, it sounds crazy but those words from Jesus, “Follow Me,” have such power in them that people literally walked away from

their lives—including family. It is irresistible. So, what happens in the mind of someone who comes under the power of God as He draws them?

MATTHEW 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after Me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and **follow Me**.

When God draws a person, they “deny” themselves. God’s draw is so powerful that a person will disavow, reject, renounce, or disown his or her SELF! That requires overcoming all primitive instincts including love for a spouse, family, and friends as well as personal needs of food, clothes, and shelter. There is GREAT power when God draws or ‘drags’ someone to follow Christ.

In fact, what God requires of those whom He calls is much more than renouncing human love and physical needs. God calls us do what is humanly impossible:

JOHN 12:25-26 “He who loves his life will lose it, and **he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life**. 26 “If anyone serves Me [*Jesus Christ*], let him **follow Me**; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him *My* Father will honor.

To hate our own life is only possible by the power of God. It is reflected in Paul’s words, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this **body of death**?” (Rom. 7:24). Was he distraught because of pain and suffering or was dragged by the power God out of his ignorance into the understanding that God gave His Son for his sins? I think the answer is obvious.

No one can resist the power of being drawn by God. When Jesus told the disciples to follow Him, they simply dropped everything and walked away from their present lives. There is also apparently great power against anyone He does NOT draw because John 6:44 says NO one can come to Christ UNLESS God draws him. The next verses are about the Pharaoh during the time of Moses but they point to the power of God when He selects someone to fulfill His purposes:

ROMANS 9:16-19 So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, **that I [God] may show My power in you**, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? **For who has resisted His will?**”

A calling from God begins with Him ‘dragging’ someone out of their previous lives. What happens next is Jesus leads the person where they need to go. Simply put, He tells them to “follow Me.” That phrase is mentioned over and over in Scripture. When we are ‘dragged’ by God and walk away, we are leaving everything behind to follow Christ. But how does someone do that?

MATTHEW 7:7-11 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 “Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

No one even knows the questions to ask until their ignorance is exposed when God draws them. It is only then that we can seek the answers from Him. God not only has to give us the answers, but He even has to provide us with the questions!

A calling from God begins by being ‘dragged’ but that actually implies a person does not have a choice. In some (or many) ways that is true. Ignorance cannot be overcome unless we KNOW we are ignorant. Children are sent to school (sometimes against their will) by parents because they know their children are ignorant. The solution is to teach them. God begins a calling by ‘dragging’ someone because no one even knows what they are missing. In other words, none of us even knew there was another path to follow much less where the trailhead was located.

But once God draws a person, he or she is called to follow Christ with all the wonders that come with it and through all the sufferings that must be endured. This is when God ‘lets go’—He only ‘drags’ someone to the trailhead. Each must choose according to their own will and desire to follow that path. God the Father is always with us because “He [*God the Father*] hath said, **I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**” (Heb. 13:5). God even reveals the path to us: “A man’s heart plans his way, But **the LORD directs his steps.**” (Prov. 16:9). And Jesus Christ is there as well—how could we “follow Him” otherwise? In fact, He is living in us:

GALATIANS 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me;** and the *life* which I now live in the flesh **I live by faith in the Son of God,** who loved me and gave Himself for me.

But we have to choose to take that path after God brings us there. Following Christ, therefore, is truly a life of faith—faith that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ allowed God the Father to draw us and faith that God leads us down that narrow path. As Paul said, “**I live by faith in the Son of God.**”

All have heard that we must “count the cost.” However, some say that is not entirely possible when first called because no one knows all the trials that will befall us in the future. However, counting the cost is not about all the temptations and sufferings that come upon us later in life. Read the full text of this:

LUKE 14:26-28 “If anyone comes to Me [*Jesus Christ*] and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life

also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 “For **which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost**, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*—

“Counting the cost” happens BEFORE starting to build. This is before a shovel is even stuck in the ground. Counting the cost means recognizing and considering that, in order to follow Christ, a person must “deny [*utterly*]” (the full meaning of the Greek word) our own self. That is why we are ‘dragged’ by God—only by His power can we renounce ourselves and walk away from everything to follow Christ.

What occurs AFTER we leave everything behind and begin to follow Christ is past counting the cost. The trials and sufferings that come upon us later cannot be a part of that cost because they were not included in the original ‘plans’. Those things that come upon us later are endured by faith because we know that:

ROMANS 8:28 And we know that **all things work together for good** to those who love God, **to those who are the called** according to *His* purpose.

When God draws us, He shows us the plans He has for us. That is when we count the cost. AFTER that is when the building of the tower begins. All the setbacks and mistakes that happen during construction require modifications to the ‘plans’ and God helps us fix the structural problems we encounter. With the sure foundation of Rock, God helps us lay each brick so the tower will withstand every storm:

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that **He [God the Father] who has begun a good work in you will complete it** until the day of Jesus Christ;

We need to be willing to let God direct us in building the tower. All of that requires faith. So, construction of the ‘self’ does not begin until we are dragged out of ignorance, counting the cost of utterly denying the self, and then choosing to follow Christ in faith. And when the day comes to ‘cut the ribbon’ for the completed tower, that *calling* changes and we become **the called**, that *choosing* changes and we become **the chosen**, and that *faith* changes and we become **the faithful**:

REVELATION 17:14 “... He [*Jesus Christ*] is Lord of lords and King of kings; and **those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.**”

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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