

When your loved one is in trouble— **Moving on with Jesus**

By Dave Batty

Have you ever said, “I would love to spend my life doing (...this....) for God, but I can’t because I’ve got this problem in my family—and I’ve got to fix it.”

How much of your life should you invest in changing your loved one?

What should you do when your son or daughter is trapped in a life-controlling problem or an addiction?

How often have family problems prevented you from doing what God wants you to do?

- ❖ **How do you decide when to help your loved one and when to leave them behind?**
- ❖ **Does moving on with Jesus mean I have to abandon my family?**
- ❖ **How do I know when my help is preventing God from doing what He wants to do in the life of my loved one?**

Complications with following God

On several occasions Jesus talked about the cost of becoming His disciple—His simple call to “come, follow me,” can be complicated by a loved one in a crisis.

Your loved one has a problem. You’ve got to spend money, time, and energy to fix their problems. These problems can be so complicated that it becomes a fulltime job that leaves you exhausted, and no time left to do what God has called you to do.

This call to follow Jesus is described in Hebrews 12:1 as a challenge to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” As you seek to apply this scripture in your life it begs the question—the race marked out by whom?

Are you running the race marked out for you by your family? —by your friends? —by yourself?

Or are you going to run the race marked out for you by Jesus?

This same verse commands us to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” so we can run the race effectively.

Perhaps for many Christians the problems of their loved ones hinder them from running the race God wants them to run. How easy for us to believe we have the power to fix the problems in the lives of our loved ones.

Ralph & his girlfriend

Ralph had been in Teen Challenge for at least 5 months—God was transforming him—setting him free from a 25 year drug addiction. But Ralph was carrying a heavy burden.

Every day he became more consumed with the fact he had gotten his girlfriend, Maria, hooked on drugs. He was now set free by God’s power, but she was still out there in her addiction.

He had written her, called her, and pleaded with her to get help—to come to Teen Challenge or some other Christian program. Maria had gone into 2 or 3

programs, but never staying more than a few days.

Ralph was discouraged, but mostly feeling the terrible guilt for getting Maria hooked on drugs. He was seriously contemplating leaving Teen Challenge. “If I go back out there, I know I can convince her to get help!”

Fortunately Ralph got godly advice from one of our staff—“Stay here, Ralph. This is where God wants you to be. It’s not your job to fix her problems. That’s between Maria and God.”

So Ralph stayed at Teen Challenge and eventually graduated and served God effectively until the day he died. But as far as I know, Maria never did let God free her from her addiction.

Exceptions to following God’s plan

The message of Hebrews 12:1-2 is clear—we must move on with God no matter what happens to

A troubled mother

I have a brother who talks a good game how he is going to do the right things, but my heart feels troubled. He’s just talking to talk.

My prayer is that he will let God change his heart so he will no longer want to be part of the dark world and the things that now pull him away from God.

our loved ones.

That’s tough medicine—but God does not say run the race He has marked out for you—“unless your loved one has a major problem.” There’s no exceptions—we must run the race God has marked out for us.

This is where the painful truth of the call to follow Jesus affects our life. In Luke 14 Jesus gave a detailed description of this call: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:26-27 NIV.

Jesus said we must be willing to set aside any relationship—even the closest family relationship if it comes between us and following Him. We cannot run two races at the same time—we must choose—run God’s race, or run the race marked out by your loved one with a problem.

So do you have to hate your father and mother to follow Jesus?

The real issue here is priority.

Men, how would your wife feel if you said, “Honey, of all 6 women that I’m in love with, you are #1.”

Your wife wants to be the only woman you are in love with. Quite a difference from being #1 of a crowd.

God says, “I’ve got to be your only God. Your love for me must be so dramatically different than your love for your family that when you

put the two side by side, it looks like you hate your family.”

Following Jesus must be your one and only passion when compared to all the other “loves” of your life.

We must move on with Jesus—run the race He has marked

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—by your family?
—by your friends?
—by yourself?
—or by Jesus?*

out for us no matter what our family does.

Some of us get a great sense of accomplishment and significance when we help those close to us. We assume it is God’s will that we do everything in our power to fix the problems in the life of our loved ones.

Our commitment to our family can bring us to the place of missing God’s best for us and for our loved one with a problem.

Elijah’s call to obedience

Sometimes God’s path may seem to contradict common sense. But moving on with Jesus must be the driving force of our lives.

Look at the Old Testament prophet Elijah. In a great encounter with King Ahab, he said no rain would come on the land for the next few years. God sent Elijah

to a lonely place, next to a brook, and had food delivered every day by ravens.

When the brook dried up, God sent him to find a widow in Zarephath to stay with her. When Elijah finds her, he asks for a drink and some bread. She responds, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” 1 Kings 17:12 NIV

Can you imagine the thoughts in Elijah’s mind? “I can’t take the last meal from this poor desperate widow and her son! Surely this is not the woman God is sending me to live with.”

But Elijah boldly says, “Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for

me.” 1 Kings 17:13 NIV

What kind of arrogance is that?! And what would godly people say? “What kind of prophet are you? Demanding this desperate widow give you her last food! You call yourself a man of God?”

Elijah could have said, “Well if this is your last meal, then you keep it and eat it. God will provide for my needs some other way.”

But if Elijah had done that, (1) he would have disobeyed God, (2) he would have robbed this woman of the opportunity to learn the lessons God wanted to teach her, and (3) he would have robbed her of God’s miraculous provision for her future needs.

Obedience to God in this case led to a miracle—as this desperate, starving widow fixed her last meal, the oil and flour did not run out. There was enough for all three of

them. And the oil and flour did not run dry until the drought ended.

But had Elijah followed the wisdom of men, he would have failed to grow in his relationship with God, and he would have robbed the widow of God’s plan for her.

As Elijah “moved on with God” in the path of obedience, he became God’s instrument for bringing the woman farther along in her walk with God.

Obedience or arrogance?

So why was this bold request by Elijah the right request to make of a desperate, starving widow?

God told Elijah before he left the dried up brook, “I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.” 1 Kings 17:9 NIV

From cute little babies to spiritual maturity

God is not looking for us to stay “babies” for the rest of our lives—He wants us to grow up! Moving on with Jesus means we are changing.

I have a new grandson who is only 4 months old. He’s a joy and a delight—he smiles, eats, and sleeps.

But what a tragedy if he never grew. The same is true of us spiritually. The writer of Hebrews makes this same challenge.

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.

“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.” Hebrews 5:11-6:1 NIV.

To move on to maturity is a difficult growing experience, but that is what God wants us to do. He doesn’t want us to stay spiritual babies.

When Elijah finds her, she does not seem to be living with a sense of confidence that God's command to her is realistic. Instead she is expecting to fix her last meal and die! That's not words of faith in action!

Perhaps she had serious doubts about obeying the voice of God—it didn't make sense from the human point of view.

But when she put obedience to God above her needs, and the needs

to the path He has marked out for you.

Hindrances to moving on with Jesus

Loved ones

Too many Christians have turned aside from God's path to care for their loved ones in trouble. "I can't just abandon my loved one! I've got to help them!"

But what is God saying to you?

One wife spent her entire adult life caring for her alcoholic husband. She worked, sacrificed, and did whatever he asked. But her daughter, reflecting on her mother's life simply said, "What a waste."

The critical question we must ask—"Jesus, what do you want me to do?"

If Jesus is telling you to care for your loved one with a problem, then do it to the best of your ability. But if God is telling you to do something else, then you must be willing to leave your loved one in the hands of Jesus and move on with Him.

Failures

Helping our loved ones is not the only thing that can keep us from moving on with Jesus. Our past failures can leave us so damaged we feel we can't move on with Him.

After spending over 3 years with Jesus, Peter boldly proclaimed

he was ready to die with Jesus—yet he failed miserably. On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter cursed and denied knowing Jesus.

He could have run away from Jesus, and gone back to being a fisherman for the rest of his life. But God still had a race for him to run!

Peter chose to move on with Jesus, in spite of his many failures. When you read the book of Acts, you see Peter moving on in obedience to the call of God. His boldness is channeled into meaningful ministry.

God has a calling on your life. Do the problems facing you seem like impossible mountains, keeping you from doing what God has put before you? With His help, you can have the confidence to move ahead with what He is calling you to do.

of her own starving child—only then did she experience God's miracle provision.

So what made the difference? The voice of God—the path God had specifically marked out for Elijah and for the widow.

If God had not spoken to them, this would be a story of arrogance on the part of a religious leader, using his position of power to take advantage of the poor.

Moving on with Jesus is not about public opinion polls and conventional wisdom. It's obedience

A mother's dilemma

Moving on with Jesus may mean telling your son—"You must leave this house."

A mother with tears streaming down her face told me how painful it was to tell her son to leave their home. He was using drugs, bringing chaos into the home, and refusing to change.

The mother had the spiritual insight and courage to see that allowing her rebellious son to stay in the home was only bringing more destruction into the whole family. She realized the family must move on with Jesus in spite of a son who had chosen a path of destruction.

Success

Another issue that can stop you from going God's way is your own success. We love success, and we may be tempted to stay in our place of success. But is this God's will, or my preference—my place of comfort?

There are times when God may say, "Yes, you have been successful in this place, but now I want you to move on—I have a new place of ministry for you."

This may not necessarily be a physical move to a new city, or

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church, or job. It may be a call to build more of God's character into our lives.

Moving on with Jesus may call for you to change your way of thinking—the renewing of your mind, as Romans 12:1-2 and Philippians 4:8-9 tell you to do.

You've got problems!

In other cases, moving on with Jesus may mean staying in the presence of a problem instead of running away from it. God wants to teach His children how to face their problems and solve them with His help.

The great missionary Paul talks about a problem he faced in his life. Three times he prayed that God would take it away. But God's answer was, "No." The problem stays.

God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV God told Paul that his problem would remain in his life to protect him from becoming conceited.

The real challenge to Paul was to grow in character so he would not be destroyed by pride. Paul goes on to rejoice about his weaknesses, "so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV.

The most important challenge facing Paul was not how to get rid of his problems, but to learn the lessons God wanted him to learn as he faced these problems each day.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I've got the same old problems in my life year after year." Maybe that person is stuck because they are not following God's path to solving their problems. So they stay stuck in the same place instead of moving on with God's help in learning from each problem. God may be waiting for us to move on in our personal growth.

Sometimes moving on with Jesus means a big change in how we live on a daily basis—perhaps a real push out of our comfort zone.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, he immediately faced two major problems—the fortified city of Jericho and how to feed the 1-2 million people traveling with him. For the previous 40 years God provided a miracle meal every

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day—manna in the morning, and quail in the evening.

As soon as they crossed the Jordan river into their new land—filled with enemies—their daily food from heaven stopped. They had to get their own food from the land. This was part of God's way of saying—it's time to move on.

It was not God's intention to permanently use a miracle to supply their need for daily food. That was His plan for 40 years while they lived in the desert.

But now that they had entered the promised land, He wanted them to work with their own hands to get the food they needed. A new level of responsibility was placed on them.

To move on in God's plan was to no longer depend on a miracle a day. That doesn't sound spiritual—but it accurately describes the path God wanted His children to follow.

The path God is calling you to

follow today may seem less secure, a move away from your comfort zone.

Leaving your loved ones in God's hands

So what change is God bringing your way? It's time to move on with Jesus up the path He has marked out for you.

Perhaps your solutions to fix the problems in your loved ones are really robbing them of God's solution—which is far better than yours.

Be willing to let God take care of your loved one with a problem. "Lord, she or he is in Your hands." And when their healing comes, you won't need to take credit for it. God gets all the credit.

The driving passion of your heart needs to be—"God help me see the path you have marked out for me, and let me move ahead on that path with Your help."

Do not assume that it is God's will for you to fix the problems in the lives of your loved ones. If you will move on with Jesus, you can have the confidence that you are doing the most effective things with your time and energies.

Just as Elijah followed God's direction, and saw the miracles follow, we too can experience God's help as we move on with Him. And yes, that may mean leaving your loved ones behind—realizing they are in God's hands. That's a very safe place to leave your loved one with a problem.

When your loved one is in trouble— Moving on with Jesus Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. How difficult is it for you to figure out the race God wants you to run?
2. What have been the times when you feel God has asked you to move out of your comfort zone?
3. Do you feel compelled to help any of your loved ones who have a problem? Describe.
4. Read Luke 14:26-27. Are there or have there been loved ones you have had to "leave behind" to be able to follow Jesus?
 - A. Describe the challenges you faced in those situations.
 - B. What are the biggest concerns or fears you face in leaving a loved one behind as you move on with Jesus?
 - C. How difficult is it for you to turn your loved one over to God and say, "Lord, s/he is in your hands"?
5. What areas of your life do you feel God calling you to "move on with Jesus"?



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