

The Call of Elisha: What It Really Means to Follow Jesus

Following Jesus is one of the most profound decisions a person can make, but it is rarely talked about honestly. What does it actually cost? What does it require? The story of Elisha's calling in First Kings 19 gives us a clear and challenging picture of what it looks like to say yes to God without hesitation.

What Happened When Elijah Found Elisha?

In First Kings 19:19-21, Elijah obeys the word of the Lord and goes to find Elisha. He finds him plowing a field with twelve yoke of oxen, driving the twelfth pair himself.

"So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him." - 1 Kings 19:19 English Standard Version (ESV)

Scholars widely agree that twelve yoke of oxen is not a small family farm. This is a large, thriving agricultural operation. Elisha came from a prominent, wealthy family. He had security, success, and a future already mapped out for him.

And yet, when Elijah threw his cloak over him, signifying God's call on His life, Elisha did not hesitate.

Why Did Elisha Walk Away from Everything?

The cloak Elijah threw over Elisha was not a call to follow Elijah. It was a call to follow God. The cloak represented the calling of the Lord, an invitation to leave behind a comfortable life and step into something far greater.

Elisha was willing to walk away from wealth, family, and security because he understood something deeply important: there is no greater joy or purpose in life than following the call of God.

He did not need to be convinced. He did not ask for time to think it over. He burned his plowing equipment, slaughtered his oxen, fed the people around him, and set out to follow Elijah.

Following Jesus Is Costly, But It Is Worth It

This is the central truth the story of Elisha's calling brings into focus. Following Jesus is costly, but it is worth it.

Jesus Himself made this clear:

"And He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let Him deny Himself and take up His cross daily and follow me.'" - Luke 9:23 English Standard Version (ESV)

To deny yourself means your priorities change. It means your time, your money, your loyalties, and your relationships are now oriented around glorifying God rather than satisfying yourself. Following Jesus may cost you:

- Your career path
- Certain friendships
- Your reputation
- Your financial priorities
- Your comfort and security

One of the greatest problems in the American church today is the idea that you can say yes to Jesus without it costing you anything. That following Him requires no sacrifice, no change, no real surrender. But that is simply not what Jesus taught.

Why Is the Church in America Declining?

Research from Pew Research shows that in 2007, roughly 78% of Americans identified as Christians. Today, that number has dropped to around 60%. The church in America has been on a steady decline for two decades.

Part of the reason is that the church has done a poor job of teaching believers to be disciples who make disciples. Somewhere along the way, the expectation that following Jesus changes everything got lost.

Interestingly, the opposite is happening in other parts of the world. In China, the number of Christians has grown from roughly 1 million to over 100 million in just 40 years. In Iran, from an estimated 500 believers in 1980 to around 2 million today. In Africa, Christians now represent over 31% of the world's Christian population.

In places where following Jesus can cost you everything, believers seem to understand more clearly what it means to live as a disciple. They understand what it means to be on mission.

What Is Discipleship Formation and Why Does It Matter?

After Elisha said yes, he became Elijah's servant. Most scholars believe that from the moment of his calling to the moment Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind (described in 2 Kings 2) was a period of eight to ten years.

During those years, Elijah poured into Elisha's life. He taught him, modeled faithfulness, and prepared him to carry the prophetic calling forward. This is discipleship formation in action.

God's design has always been for believers to grow from new faith into mature faith, and then to invest that faith into others. The progression looks like this: unbelievers becoming believers, believers becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus, and disciples becoming disciple makers.

Elisha would go on to become one of the greatest prophets in all of Israel's history. And it all began with a simple, costly yes.

Three Questions to Ask Yourself About Following Jesus

1. Will You Follow Jesus?

This is not simply a question about believing in Jesus as Savior. It is a question about making Him Lord. One of the clearest marks of spiritual maturity is a short time span between a command and obedience. Elisha heard the call and responded immediately. How quickly do you respond when God calls?

2. What Plow Do You Need to Burn?

Elisha burned his plowing equipment. He made it impossible to go back to his old life. Jesus said:

"No one who puts His hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." - Luke 9:62
English Standard Version (ESV)

What is it in your life that keeps pulling your eyes backward? What do you need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus fully, in every area of your life?

3. Who Is God Calling You to Disciple?

Very shortly after you begin following Jesus, God calls you to invest in someone else. It might be your children, a friend, a coworker, or someone in your small group. Discipleship is not reserved for pastors or ministry leaders. It is the calling of every believer.

Life Application

This week, identify one specific area of your life where you have been holding back from fully following Jesus. It might be how you spend your time, where your money goes, a relationship that pulls you away from God, or a habit that keeps you looking backward. Take one concrete step this week to "burn the plow" in that area. Tell someone you trust what you are doing and ask them to hold you accountable.

As you reflect, consider these questions:

- Is there a gap between calling yourself a Christian and actually living as a disciple of Jesus?
- What is one thing you are holding onto that God may be asking you to surrender?
- Is there someone in your life right now that God is calling you to invest in and disciple?
- When God calls you to something, how quickly do you respond?

God is calling each of us from an ordinary life of plowing to something far greater. You can spend your life plowing. Or you can say yes to the call. The question is, will you?