

## How to Handle Rejection

Luke 9:51-56

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### INTRODUCTION:

A recent graduate was getting frustrated with his inability to land a job, despite going to dozens of interviews. Finally, he dashed off the following letter to one of the companies that had rejected him:

*Dear Hiring Manager,*

*Thank you for your letter of March 1. After careful consideration, I regret to inform you that I am unable to accept your refusal to offer me a position in your department.*

*This year I have been particularly fortunate in receiving an unusually large number of rejection letters. With such a varied and promising field of candidates, it is impossible for me to accept all refusals.*

*Despite your companies outstanding qualifications and previous experience in rejecting applicants, I find that your rejection does not meet my needs at this time. Therefore, I will assume the position in your department this August.*

*I look forward to seeing you then.*

*Best of luck in rejecting future applicants.*

That's one way to handle rejection!

Rejection is a fact of life. Rejection can leave us with dashed hopes and broken dreams, or it could leave us frustrated, angry or bitter. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln received more votes than Stephen A. Douglas in the race for the Illinois US Senate seat, but the Illinois legislature used some questionable legal maneuvering to send Douglas to Washington instead. Someone asked Lincoln how he felt, and he reportedly replied, "Like the boy who stubbed his toe: I am too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh."

The fear of rejection sometimes chain us in a prison of fear, preventing us from taking risks that could lead to big pay offs.

For the person who sets his face to follow Christ, rejection is a familiar companion as we seek to share our faith with others. Jesus himself faced rejection. How did he deal with it?

**I. Luke 9:51 marks a major transition in Luke's account of Jesus' life, with the focus becoming more and more about Jesus' inevitable rendezvous with the cross in Jerusalem. (v. 51)**

***A. Luke's description of the journey to Jerusalem is more about destiny than geography.<sup>1</sup>***

- 1. Although Jerusalem casts a big shadow over rest of the story, Jesus did not head straight to the city.**
- 2. In the chapters that follow there are still many events for Luke to recount, not all of which occur on the literal road to Jerusalem.**

***B. The "journey to Jerusalem" is Luke's way of saying that from this point on in the story, Jesus' inevitable death is moving more to the forefront.***

***C. Jesus' death was not an interruption of God's plan; rather, it was part of the plan all along.***

- 1. When Luke refers to "His ascension", he is referring to Jesus' eventual death, burial and resurrection, culminating in his ascension back to heaven.**
- 2. Some people may be tempted to say, "Jesus was such a great man, imagine what he could have accomplished if only he hadn't gotten himself crucified."**

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, ed. David S. Dockery, Vol. 24 (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1992), 296; Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, 796-1059 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 931-32.

**3. People who think that are missing the point, which was that Jesus' main purpose for coming to earth was to die on our behalf.**

a) (Romans 5:8-10) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

b) Jesus, the sinless Son of God, came to share our death in order that we may share His life.

**4. From this point on in Luke's story, the clock is ticking towards Jesus' appointment with the cross.**

***D. Jesus was not a helpless victim, but willingly embraced his destiny of suffering, rejection, death and resurrection for our sake. (v. 51)***

**1. Literally, Luke says that Jesus 'set his face' to go to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>**

**2. The cross would not be a surprise to Jesus.**

**3. He knew the cross lay in his future, and had predicted this to his disciples.**

a) (Luke 9:21-22) "But He warned them and instructed *them* not to tell this to anyone, saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.'"

b) Jesus knew in advance that then rejection he would face would be total, but he chose to accept it anyway so that he might rescue us from our sins.

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<sup>2</sup> Stein, 298.

**4. The appointment with the cross was one that Jesus was determined to keep.**

***E. Jesus' determination to embrace his mission also sets a pattern for those who would follow him: where is your Jerusalem? (v. 51)***

**1. When Jesus had informed his disciples of his inevitable death, he also informed them that those who followed him must be prepared to walk the same path.**

**2. (Luke 9:23-24) "And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."**

**3. Following Jesus often leads us out of our comfort zone.**

a) Many profess their faith in Jesus only for the perceived "benefits."

b) True faith in Jesus requires us to take all of our plans, desires and dreams and nail them to the cross.

c) True faith in Jesus requires us to put our whole lives, including our families, our careers, our friendships, our possessions and our leisure time, on the altar and say, "Lord, what would you have me do?"

**4. Where is Jesus leading you, that you might not be comfortable in going?**

**II. Jesus' commitment to his mission led him to take risks and cross physical and cultural barriers to see it fulfilled. (v. 52)**

***A. Jesus' journey to Jerusalem took him straight into territory controlled by the Samaritans.***

***B. Historically, a great deal of animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans.<sup>3</sup>***

- 1. After Solomon's death, the nation of Israel split into two separate countries: the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12).**
  - a) The citizens of Judah, with their capital in Jerusalem, eventually came to be known as the "Jews."
  - b) The northern kingdom was also referred to as "Samaria", after its capital city.
- 2. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians, who carried off Samaria's leading families into exile and settled foreign refugees in Israel.**
- 3. These foreign refugees inter-married with the Israelites who were left, creating a half-breed ethnic group which came to be known as the "Samaritans."**
  - a) These Samaritans developed their own customs, moral code and religion, based on a mixture of Hebrew and pagan traditions.
  - b) The beliefs and practices of the Samaritans often put them at odds with their Jewish neighbors.
- 4. As the Jews began to resettle Israel following the Babylonian exile, the Samaritans were squeezed into a central territory separating Judea and Galilee.**
- 5. Most Jews traveling between Judea and Galilee would go days out of their way to avoid the Samaritans.**

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<sup>3</sup> Stein, 318.

**6. Those Jews either brave or foolish enough to travel through Samaritan territory often encountered suspicion or outright hostility.**

**a) That hostility was particularly hot towards Jews making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.**

**b) The historian Josephus relates an account of a large number of Jewish pilgrims actually being murdered by bands of Samaritans.<sup>4</sup>**

***C. Despite the risk, Jesus traveled through Samaria and sent an advance team into a Samaritan village to secure lodging.***

**1. It is telling that in all of his dealings with Samaritans, Jesus reached out to them with dignity and compassion.**

**a) The Samaritans were invited to receive Jesus just as the Jews were.**

**b) In reaching out to Samaritans, Jesus risked not only their hostility but running afoul of the prejudices of his own people.**

**c) What barriers is Jesus calling you to cross today?**

**2. The sending of the advance team was a prudent gesture.**

**a) Most villages were small, with a population numbered in the dozens.**

**b) The unexpected arrival of a dozen or so guests could place a strain on the village's ability to extend hospitality.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Wars* ii.232; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX Chapter 6.1.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 196.

***D. Nevertheless, the Samaritan villagers rejected Jesus and refused him entry.***

**III. The Samaritan's disrespect towards Jesus serves as a reminder that in seeking to follow him we inevitably will encounter rejections and roadblocks. (v.52)**

***A. The reaction of James and John to the rejection by the Samaritans shows that their values were still more reflective of earth than heaven. (v. 54)***

- 1. How many times have you ever wished you could “call down fire” on someone who crossed you?**
- 2. The true follower of Jesus should not respond to rejection by seeking retribution. (vv. 54-55)**
  - a) The suggestion by James and John earned a strong rebuke from Jesus.<sup>6</sup>**
  - b) Jesus reminded them that his followers should live by a different set of values (“what kind of spirit you are of”).**
- 3. As followers of Jesus, in our dealings with others we should always strive to be redemptive. (v. 56)**
  - a) The underlying purpose of everything Jesus did was to save people, not to destroy them.**
    - (1) (John 3:17) “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”***
    - (2) (2 Peter 3:9) “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”***

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<sup>6</sup> Liefeld, 933.

**b) As his followers, our underlying purpose should always be directed at trying to take people from where they are to where they need to be.**

**(1) *[Illustration] The Ugly Stone***

**(a) A gem dealer was strolling the aisles at a Gem and Mineral show when he noticed an ugly, blue-violet stone about the size and shape of a potato.**

**(b) When he asked the vendor, “Will you take \$15 for it?”, the seller was so embarrassed by the stone that he sold it for only \$10.**

**(c) The dealer bought the stone, took it to his shop and began the work of cleaning it up.**

**(d) What was once an ugly stone was eventually certified as a 1,905 carot natural star sapphire, nearly double the size what was up until then was the largest known such stone, and worth over two and a quarter million dollars.**

**(e) “It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire’s worth. It took the Lover of Souls to recognize the true value of ordinary-looking people like us.”<sup>7</sup>**

**(2) *Everyone you interact would could be a valuable gem in disguise, just waiting for someone to give them the attention and time they need.***

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<sup>7</sup> Wanda Vassallo, “Redemption”, *Leadership Journal*, article online; available at <http://www.sermoncentral.com/Illustrations/SearchResults.asp?sscater=illustrations&sitesearch=ros-redemption&rk=redemption&keyword=redemption>; accessed 28 January 2012.

**c) What kind of difference would it make if we approached all of our relationships with this attitude?**

**(1) *In our personal relationships***

**(2) *In our work relationships***

**(3) *In our church relationships***

**(a) [Illustration] Churches that treat their staff like the business and athletic worlds do**

(i) “If you can't produce, don't let the door hit you on the way out.”

(ii) How does this attitude match up to the attitude of Jesus?

**(b) Recognizing that we are all flawed, fallen creatures in need of God's grace gives us the opportunity to show grace to others.**

***B. Sometimes love calls for us to move on and allow people to take responsibility for their own actions. (v. 56)***

**1. Jesus had already told his disciples what to do when a village rejected them.**

**a) (Luke 9:5) “And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”**

**b) This gesture was a way of saying to those doing the rejection that they alone bore responsibility for the consequences of their rejection.**

c) **After shaking the dust from their feet, the disciples were instructed to move on in search of a more receptive audience.**

**2. Jesus led his disciples to move on.**

a) **If people want to destroy themselves, we should not help them in the process.**

b) **This is the same approach God takes with us.**

**(1) (Genesis 6:3) “Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...”**

**(2) (Romans 1)--God “gave them over” to the corrupted desires of their hearts.**

**IV. When Jesus comes to visit you, will you receive him or reject him? (v. 56)**

## CONCLUSION

The story is told about the famous preacher G. Campbell Morgan, about how he applied to his denomination for ordination in 1888. In his denomination, candidates for the ministry had to pass a doctrinal exam, then preach a trial sermon before a jury of denominational officials. Campbell was part of a class of 150 young men to go through the process together, and he was part of the 105 who were rejected by the jury. In despair, he wrote his father a one word message, “Rejected!”. His father wrote back, “Rejected by the world, but approved by heaven.”<sup>8</sup> Morgan went on to become one of the most famous preachers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If you have given yourself over to Jesus, you have God's approval, and that is the only approval that truly matters. After all, “if God is for us, who can be against us” (Romans 8:31)? Knowing that we have God's approval allows us to respond graciously to the rejection of others

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<sup>8</sup> Sermonillustrations.com, s.v. “Rejection”, article on-line; available at <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/r/rejection.htm>; accessed 28 January 2012.

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