

Chan Willis – F.P.C.-L.C.  
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**“Difficult Discipleship”**  
Matthew 10:24-39

Over the course of the last week, I have given considerable thought to a word that we are all familiar with: “FAN.” No, not the one that you use to relieve the oppressive HEAT that we have here in S. LA. I mean that word that we use to describe our relationship with a particular individual, concept, or **team**. It comes from the word ‘fanatic’, which is described as one who is “*marked by excessive enthusiasm and often intense uncritical devotion.*” And as most of you know, in describing the manner in which I am a ‘F-A-N’ there would be 3 other letters to put in front of those 3: “L.S.U.” For this school I have been known to exhibit ‘excessive enthusiasm’ and ‘often intense devotion.’ The ‘uncritical’ part? Well, I’m not so sure about *that* part...

This week, as most of you know, many of us L.S.U. fans have ridden on that roller-coaster ride of competition known as the College World Series. There have, of course, been times of great **excitement** and **euphoria**... and times of deep **despair** and **disappointment**. Times when I hung on every second of the broadcast... and times when I turned it off before it was officially over. Times when I couldn’t wait to talk about the game *today*... and times that I hoped no one would mention it *tomorrow*... Let’s face it, when it comes to ‘fans,’ too often the word ‘fickle’ is used in conjunction with it. As it is with politics and business, The prevalent attitude can be, ‘What have you done for me *lately*?’ (Of course, in the case of LSU in the C.W.S., the answer to that question right now is ‘A LOT!’)

But we did not come here this morning to consider the merits and de-merits of being a ‘FAN’ of a particular team. But rather, we are here to consider a much more important word that also starts with ‘F’... our **FAITH**. And particularly, our faith in the One who stands at the very center of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ.

This being said, there can also be a sort of ‘fan’ mentality to our practice of faith in Christ. There are those times when we can really be ‘**excited**’ about special times of worship, discussion, prayer... and those times when the ‘**despair** and **disappointment**’ of daily life can

cause us to question our very association with this 'Team Jesus.' There are times when we truly **hunger** to **hear God** speaking to us in worship... and other times when we are **tuned out** long before the 'broadcast' is over. There are times when we really want to talk about what happened in our Sunday 'happy hour'... and others when by the time Monday comes around people would never know that we even 'attended the game' the day before. We too can be those 'fickle fans' whose attitude toward God is, 'What have you done for me *lately*?'

In his book, Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus, author Kyle Idleman writes: *"My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following him. **The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ.**"*

Today's Scriptures move us who might be more 'fans' into the direction of being a 'follower.' It's easy to be a 'fan' when we consider the Jesus who says 'love your God,' or 'love your neighbor,' or 'feed the poor,' or 'visit the sick.' YAY! LET'S GO JESUS! But when He starts talking about 'one's foes being members of one's own household'... 'taking up the cross'... 'losing one's life'... 'HEY, maybe it's time to change the channel. Things not looking so good for the home team!' So, for the next few minutes, let's look at some of the things that Jesus told his disciples that are hard for us to hear... or understand. That which would convert us from being a 'fan' to a 'follower.' Today we consider Jesus' challenges of '**Difficult Discipleship.**'

I would begin with the one that probably troubles ME as much as any passage in Scripture. Beginning in v. 34, Jesus says: ***"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and one's foes will be members of one's own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..."*** (Matthew 10:34-37)

Show of hands: How many of you have **sons** or **daughters**? How many of you **love** them? How many of you love them MORE than Jesus Christ? [pastor's hand creeping up] Did

you find your hand *wanting* to go up? After just having had a wonderful Father's day in Houston with our son, and a birthday that really made me appreciate the blessings I have of family, I LOVE MY CHILDREN! (AND the one who made them possible! ☺) The thought of one's **enemies** being my own flesh-and-blood is a pretty foreign concept! But I think that there's two things that we need to take from Jesus' challenging words.

One is that there are situations that arise which make a person choose between God and family. Particularly those who may come from a non-Christian background, and their family is resistant to their choice to leave their current 'belief system' and follow Jesus. While not necessarily easy to comply with, Jesus' words are pretty clear: ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."*** (John 14:6)

But while we may not be faced with such a drastic change within our family, we DO need to be good examples to our families of what it means to live a Christian life. And I don't mean merely for an hour or so on Sunday morning. Yes, the time we devote to worship and study in the corporate body is important. But even moreso is the **daily example** we live in front of our children, and grandchildren, and extended family. Does the way we speak, act, and react bear witness the faith we profess? Do members of our family influence the manner in which we live out... or fail to live out... our belief in Christ? Or do WE influence THEM? That O.T. author of Joshua had it right: ***"Choose you this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** (Joshua 24:15)

But perhaps the simplest way for me to understand Jesus' admonition that ***"whoever loves father or mother... son or daughter... more than me is not worthy of me"*** is this: I believe that God does not want me to love my family... my son and daughters... and LESS; He just wants me to love His Son MORE...

The bottom line is this: no matter WHO I am with... be it a close family member or a perfect stranger... I must always be conscious of whether or not my words and deeds reflect my belief in the Triune God. Again, like in that passage I referred to earlier from John 14, Jesus words are pretty clear:

***"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before***

**my Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 10:32) I must always be conscious of what I DO and SAY... is it **acknowledging** Jesus as Lord of my life... or is it **denying** Him? For the consequences of either are pretty great...

It is this notion of how we, as disciples of Christ, are either acknowledging or denying Him to others, be they family, friend, or stranger, that brings me to what may be the most difficult challenge to being a follower rather than a fan: **FEAR**. When Jesus is warning His followers that if they thought that HE was persecuted for His faith, they were in for much MORE, He follows that admonition with words of comfort. THREE times Jesus says: **“Have no fear... do not be afraid... do not fear.”** YES, you need to take up the same instrument of death, the cross, and follow me. But **“have no fear.”** YES, there are those who can kill your body... but they can NOT kill your soul. **“Do not be afraid.”** YES, I want you to speak aloud in the **light** what I say to you in the **dark**... YES, I want you to proclaim from the rooftops what I whisper to you in quiet rooms. But **“do not fear.”** Jesus assures His disciples that if even the tiniest sparrow cannot fall to the ground apart from the Father, how much MORE value are YOU!? **“Those who lose their life for my sake WILL find it.” ... “So have no fear.”** (Matthew 10:39, 26)

So just HOW does that work? How can we live a life without fear? Sure, the Son of God **promised** that if we live a life for Him, and lose that life, it will be found again; but how do we... as the weak, frail, doubt-filled ‘sparrows’ that we are... **believe** that promise, and **follow** it accordingly?

As I pondered these challenging questions, the answer came to me... and HOW? God speaking to me? A vision? An inspired Bible verse? No. FACEBOOK! And see, you thought it was just good to share pictures and convince people just how GREAT your life is! Well, actually, it was via FB Messenger, and even tho it was sent by the quite human Sara Judson, I kind of think it was Divinely-ordained.

What she shared with me was a YouTube video of an interview with a couple... a podcast that was actually recorded in a CAR. A ‘CAR-CAST’, if you will. Kind of like James Corden’s “Carpool Karaoke.” But this one had a MUCH more significant message. It is a series of discussions about faith by a lady named Kay Wyma. The couple she interviewed in this segment are **Greg and Tracey Murtha**. It is entitled **“Abundance in the Midst of Interruptions.”**

Greg (at 46, a father, a husband, a friend to many, at the height of his business career) had been diagnosed four years ago with Stage 4 Colon Cancer. And in this interview Greg and Tracey share how God has used this long ordeal of facing death to His glory... showing them both how **abundant life** could be in the midst of a such a sobering '**interruption**.' What makes this couple's story even more captivating is that Tracy is a college sorority sister of Sara's, whose story she has followed over these last few years.

Now, you should understand that Sara sent me this powerful video... which is some 38 minutes long... on **Friday** in the midst of doing my 'homework' for today's service. (Speaking of 'interruptions'!) And yet, there was that 'small still voice'... or, as the Murthas called it, a '*prompting*'... that told me to watch it. And about an hour later... which includes all the pauses I made to take notes... I was so thankful to Sara for sharing it with me. I will be sending out the link in the AM...

There are far too many 'tidbits' of wisdom and inspiration for this morning's message... as you might have gathered from the copious 'note-taking' I mentioned earlier. But I would share with you this quote from Greg:

"I'm **thankful God used cancer to save me from myself**... Frankly, I've discovered **life is richer because of my **interruption**** than it was without it." He also said that he was most **thankful** that his **son** and **wife knew Christ** as their Lord and Savior; grateful for a **church community** that would be there to care for his family; and finally, his gratitude for this "interruption" that "**leads me to places where there are people who need to receive what I have to share.**" He would go on to say that "It forces me to **slow down** and **make eye contact with God**. It makes me **solely dependent upon him**, and **there's not a better place to be. ... I've never felt more alive.** "

Thursday night... just weeks after the taping of this video... Greg Murtha was taken into the loving arms of His Heavenly Father. He has now been afforded the opportunity to truly make 'eye contact with God'... 'No better place to be' in order that he might 'never feel more alive.'

Like so many other faithful saints we know whose lives have been living testimonies to God's grace, Greg Murtha was no mere 'fan'... he was a 'follower.' He did not simply 'cheer for

Jesus'... he was a 'cheer-leader.' May the Murtha family's example be one for us ALL to follow... that in the words of Scriptures: ***"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** (Joshua 24:15)

That we serve the Lord by going to people who need what we have to share: ***"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven."*** (Mt. 10:32) And never forgetting: ***"Those who lose their life for my sake WILL find it." ... "So HAVE NO FEAR."*** (Matthew 10:39, 26) And may all of God's 'disciples' say, "AMEN!"

### CHARGE

"There is a tendency to define yourself as a follower based on how you feel about Jesus, but following requires there to be more than a feeling.

Following requires movement." -- Kyle Idleman

"THE PLAN: *"Skid into heaven broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaim, 'Wow!' "* -- Greg Murtha

*"Take Up Your Cross"*

Garnaas-Holmes

**We believe in God, the maker of all things and source of all life.  
Our life is in God, and in God we are one with all beings.  
We follow Jesus, the Christ, the Revealer of God, who taught us to love,  
who gave us courage to trust God's grace,  
and who bid us to take up our cross and follow him.  
In his life and ministry and his death and resurrection,  
he has shown us that in losing our lives we find them.  
He who was crucified is the Lord of the Universe.  
We rely upon the power and presence of the Holy Spirit,  
the communion of saints, the unity of the church,  
the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body,  
and the reality of eternal life.  
Therefore we devote ourselves to disciplined practice  
of the Way of Jesus in our daily lives,  
so that we may grow in faithfulness, and serve God in humble, confident love  
for the sake of the healing of the world. Amen.**

**Greg & Tracey Murtha** – she was sorority sister of Sara J. When Greg (at 46, a father, a husband, a friend to many, at the height of his career) heard the words, "Mr. Murtha, you have cancer," he and his wife Tracey never realized how **abundant life** could be in the midst of a such a sobering **interruption**. With Stage IV Metastasized Cancer and facing death - Greg now confidently says, *"I've never felt more alive."* Thankful to be involved in something that MATTERED. So many wait until age 50... no guarantees will REACH that age!

"I was doing things for God... MY WAY." Look for **interruptions**. Much of Jesus' ministry arose out of 'interruptions.' Even tho only had THREE years to do it. And yet so much of miracles that he did were NOT on his 'daytimer/planner.'

In midst of his deepest sickness, **1)** thankful son & wife know Jesus; **2)** church community would be there to care for family; **3)** in midst of his suffering, looked around for others who needed encouragement and 'healing'... from the LORD.

Perspective change: this has happened to me, to "I'm on a mission". Look for opportunities for God out of the 'unexpected.' Overheard couple's conversation in waiting room, introduced self, gave names of drs., PRAYED (but only if couple could pray for THEM.) **"It is amazingly exciting to connect with people."** 74 ROUNDS OF CHEMO. HOSPITALS, DRS. OFFICES. A **businessman**. *"the closest distance between 2 hearts is the way of brokenness."* –Ann Voskamp **EVERYONE** is wrestling with something. Can be so focused on tasks that we overlook much more important things right in front of us. How to be a **blessing** and not a **burden** to someone going through a struggle like CA: don't ask 'what can I do', re: *they don't know!* Ask GOD what you should do. AND, you don't have to have all the answers... cause no one has them anyway! Ex. of 1<sup>st</sup> marathon, friend met him at mile 20 ☺ and kept up with the 'attaboys,' and finally he said, 'just shut up! All I want is for you to BE HERE...' **Amen!** Mentioned phone call from friend that simply said 'Just wanted you to know that I LOVE you and am PRAYING for you. Bye.' Written a book Out of the Blue: The Unexpected Adventure of Life Interrupted Goal of book: You will never find life outside of Jesus. Pursued life in so many ways that didn't deliver. 1) spend time in the Word. 2) spend time praying. When you're **thankful**, it's hard to feel bad re: situation. 3) slowing down and listening for God's small still

voice. Can you be a 'successful businessman' (ex. of Good Samaritan) and allow for 'interruptions?' Def. of 'successful' may change.

**"I find more life in entering someone's life than closing a deal."** The only 2 things that are going to last when it's all said and done are friends (the souls of men) and the Word of God.

**Success = being obedient to God.** For God wants your ultimate success. 'God talking to me' – not before, cause too busy. NOT audible, but in a 'sense,' a 'prompting'... ("***the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how we ought to pray,***

***but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words.***' (Rom 8:26-27) "You have to look around to see the need to feel the prompting." LESSONS: Slow down. (Busy steals).

**Open your eyes. Be 'other centered.'** CELEBRATE BIG. "***To live is Christ, and to die is gain.***" "Everyone I meet I invite to my memorial service." [in our SoWS liturgy, "go forth to live as those who are prepared to die." ] Funeral svc. should NOT be 'all dressed in black, somber, serving cookies and kool-aid. OK if you're in Pre-K." TODAY – bring **joy** to another's life, and **celebrate** something... even in toughest times.

"THE PLAN: "*Skid into heaven broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaim, 'Wow!' "*