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It's not a good time to be making investments.

But the reality is, we make investments every day . . . the question is . . .
What kind of investments have you been making?

You disagree?



Whether it is the stock market



or the supermarket
the commodities market or the cookie jar
we all make investment decisions each and every day of our lives.

And some of our investments are better than others – depending on what
compels us to make that investment.

Sometimes we're not even sure what kind of "payoff" we're looking for.

With a stock portfolio, it's easy to flip to the summary page and check the bottom
line – not a lot of fun to do these days!

In the real-estate market, you check the appreciation rate of your property and compare it with other properties in the area.

In the supermarket, you count the number of grocery bags you come out with to check quantity, and you count the number of chews it takes to get down a bite of supposedly prime-cut steak to check quality.



- But what kind of payoff do you look for from the investment you make in your children? Or grandchildren?
- What kind of payoff do you look for from the investment you make in your spouse?
- What kind of payoff do you look for from the investment you make in the arts?
- What kind of payoff do you look for from the investment you make in friends?
- What kind of payoff do you look for from the investment you make in Ridge church?

Sure, you can count diplomas earned, anniversaries celebrated, concerts attended, dinner invitations received, and building expansions completed.

But are those the "real" payoffs?

Do those tangible, measurable, even countable "returns" reflect the genuine nature of the investment you have made in love and family, or nurturing your soul and mind and body?

Listen to the advise of Jesus:

(Luke 9:51-62 NRSV) When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. {52} And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; {53} but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. {54} When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume

them?" {55} But he turned and rebuked them. {56} Then they went on to another village. {57} As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." {58} And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." {59} To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." {60} But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." {61} Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." {62} Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."



Did you listen carefully to those words? In it Jesus gives some very tough investment advice to some very naive investors.

Jesus reminds us that authentic discipleship is often very different than it may first appear.

Each of this week's three seekers saw following Jesus as a kind of one-time investment that would bring about some definitive payoff.

But to be a follower of Jesus is an investment that takes daily maintenance. It is a commitment that requires — to use an investment term — **WholeLife Discipleship**.



The biblical theme of "sojourning" is central to the Bible. Beginning with the Bible's original sojourner, Abraham, and continuing through Moses and the Exodus, life in Canaan, and the band of disciples that "sojourned" with Jesus, a

dominant metaphor for discipleship is one of the walk or "sojourn."

It is not surprising that the earliest disciples were known as people of "The Way."

According to today's text, the Walk of WholeLife Discipleship involves three components: 1) Walk Along; 2) Walk Away; and 3) Walk On.

Let's look at the three people that Jesus met along the way in today's story.

The first would-be disciple that approaches Jesus today claims he will follow Jesus "wherever you will go!"

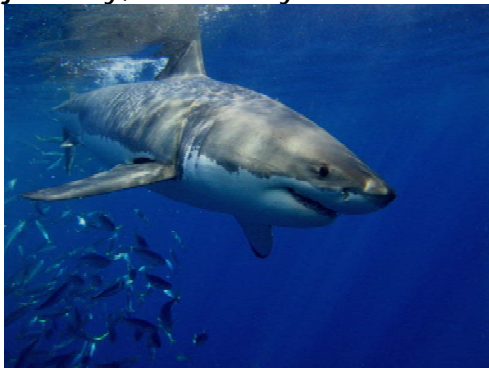
He didn't get it.

Discipleship is not about the "destination;" it is about the journey itself.

That's why Jesus makes it clear that he has "nowhere" to call his permanent home, and if Jesus has nowhere to call home, his disciples must also be committed to, invested in, a life of MOVEMENT.

Only by continually moving along, — keeping up and in step with the breath of the Spirit — do disciples genuinely "follow" Jesus.

There is no final "resting place" on this earth because our rest is nested on the journey, not at any final destination.



Sharks are one of the oldest, most primitive, and most successful vertebrate groups still in existence today. But in order for a shark to keep breathing, keep oxygenating water flowing through its gills, a shark must keep moving all the time. The gill slits on a shark lack the fluttering fins found in other fish that work to constantly direct a stream of water over their gills. Sharks must invest their whole body in order to move oxygen through their system and so stay alive.



It's the same with WholeLife Discipleship.

Jesus calls us to a "keep walking along" investment that has a guarantee:
you will spend your life traversing fresh paths and new roads.

The second seeker Jesus encounters today indicates that he too will follow Jesus. But before he can do that he must first properly "close out" a previous "account" relating to other investments he deems more important than the one Jesus offers.

He must attend to family duties before he can think of investing in any new venture.

Let me be clear — Jesus' reprimand should not be misread or misheard as heaping disrespect on the dead or implying that fulfilling obligations to a deceased parent is a profitless enterprise.

What Jesus did insist on — from the very beginning — is that his disciples be preoccupied with investing in LIFE, whatever the circumstances or situations they found themselves in.

WholeLife disciples of Jesus are called to invest in life, and walk away from the dead letter of tradition lived only for tradition's sake.

In other words — Disciples are called by Jesus to walk away from, and to walk in and toward.

WholeLife disciples must both walk away from old rubrics, stale strategies, tired truisms, and also walk in and toward the midst of this world.

Disciples are called:

to be in the midst of politics,
in the midst of economics,
in the midst of social change,

in the midst of health crises,
in the midst of generational conflicts,
in the midst of the arts,
in the midst of scientific breakthroughs,
in the midst of the Internet,
in the midst of children,
in the midst of the aged
--in the midst of all that makes up human existence in this time and place.

WholeLife Discipling with Jesus means investing in life.

The third potential disciple who approaches Jesus claims that he too is ready to follow. But he begs permission to go and give his farewells to his family before beginning the discipleship journey.

Like the second seeker, this man is concerned with seeing through the other investments he has made in life before road-testing any new venture.

Any broker will tell you: one of the riskiest markets anyone can get into is investing in the value of "futures" — betting on how much the price of certain commodities will rise or fall.

But this riskiest, most daredevil investment is exactly what Jesus calls disciples to do with their lives.

Even as disciples are called to walk along new paths and walk on the most traveled roads of this world, disciples are called to walk on and out into the unknown future.

A disciple always keeps eyes forward, fixed on and believing the promises of the kingdom of God.



Some say Karl Wallenda was the greatest tightrope walker who ever lived. He was

famous for walking high in the air across great distances without a net. What was equally as amazing is that the older he got, the more breathtaking his walks. In his 70s he improved on walks he had done in his 20s and 30s.

In 1978, while performing a tightrope walk between two buildings in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Karl Wallenda fell to his death.

His wife was interviewed on television some weeks after his death. She said: "It was very strange, for months prior to his last walk, he thought about nothing else. For the first time, he had nightmares about falling." She talked about his hesitancy and his looking back at past successes.

Wallenda's wife also revealed that he even checked the installation and construction of the wire himself. "This was the first time, Karl had ever done that", she said.

What led to Wallenda's fall?

Negative mental images of his walk, hesitation and fear.
They are the same things that lead to falls in our spiritual life.



So as we begin this Lenten journey
Walk along -- keep moving.

Walk away -- keep growing.

Walk on -- keep believing.