**Inconvenient Faith**

**Sept 15th, 2019**

I’ve been thinking about this word through the summer. Convenient.

Feeling convicted that my faith is often way too convenient.

But in looking at the life of Jesus, it is far from it.

As I pondered this idea of Inconvenient Faith, Kenda sent me this article by Richard Stearns, the current President of World Vision.

He says that he dove into a “dark night of the soul”, and what threw him into turmoil was a call from World Vision.

As a result he began reading my Bible with greater intensity. All part of healthy discernment process.

It was then he came to this passage, the text that was just read to us. Matthew 19. As he read the all too familiar text he says that he wanted to run for the scissors and cut it out of his bible.

As he read the passage, he saw himself in the main character of the story. He was the man, the rich young ruler.

Like all of scripture, we too are invited to see ourselves in each narrative, each story…who am I in this scene?

He saw himself in the man, because he too was young and prosperous, he was held in high esteem by his peers and his community.

This man, who came to Jesus, seemed to exemplify the pinnacle of Jewish respectability. Richard imagined that this man was successful in everything he did, that he went to temple regularly, tithed his income, observed all the holy days and feasts, and read his Torah.

He had worked the whole system and had ended up at the top.

As he pondered who this man was, he felt like he was under God’s microscope.

He knew this man was him, in spades.

Everyone who knew him would have said that he was a poster boy for the successful Christian life — church every Sunday, great marriage, five attractive (above-average) kids, a corporate CEO with a Bible on his desk, a faithful supporter of Christian causes — the whole Christian enchilada.

So he could really relate to this guy’s frame of mind.

He imagined that this rich young ruler came to Jesus that day filled with a bit of pride, asking the question he did, expecting a nice pat on the back, perhaps using him as a public example of what spiritual maturity is all about.

 “This, my friends, is exactly the kind of follower I am looking for.”

In contrast to this, what really happened, was very much the opposite.

Jesus says these words. “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” — [Matthew 19:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019:17&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)

That was not what the man had wanted to hear. So, trying to pin Jesus down a bit more, he asked, “Which ones?” ([Matthew 19:18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019:18&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)).

Jesus’ reply was conventional:

‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself’. — [Matthew 19:18-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019:18-19&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)

This is just the answer the young man wanted to hear. Now he felt reassured…somewhat pleased.

He says in response to Jesus, “All these I have kept,” he said ([Matthew 19:20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019:20&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)).

In other words he responds, “Check me out, Jesus. Check out my reputation. Ask my rabbi. You’ll find that I have got all these bases covered.”

This is where the guy should have stopped — no harm, no foul. He should have just said thank you to Jesus, shaken His hand, and walked away.

But no, he decided to push it just a little further. This is where I believe we see his deep longing. He knew even though he was doing all these things, he knew something wasn’t right. Something was misplaced in his soul.

So he asks, “What do I still lack?”

And this is when Jesus exposed the motive of his heart.

I imagine Jesus saying these words, hard words, with total love. I imagine the man sensed it too.

Jesus turns to the righteous young man and says, “This one thing you lack, go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow Me. — [Mark 10:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2010:21&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)

Can you imagine what must have been going through the young man’s mind just then? You’ve got to be serious, Jesus. That’s a bit inconvenient, don’t you think?

I’ve worked hard to get where I am, and I have obligations.

I can’t just pick up and leave. I’ve got a wife and kids to support, workers who depend on me, and some big financial deals that are pending — I own a lot of land here. Aren’t you taking this a little too far?

Maybe the temptation was to just write a bigger check to help the poor and make this whole thing go away?

But Jesus’ words hung in the air: “One thing you lack… Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor… Then come, follow Me.”

**Devastating. Such an inconvenient response.**

Jesus had looked into the man’s soul and diagnosed the condition of his heart. You see, on the outside he was doing all the right things, but on the inside his heart was divided. His possessions and his position were competing with God for primacy. He had surrendered his outward behavior to God, but his commitment to him was not absolute.

He had not made a total surrender of self; he had not bet the farm.

I agree with Richard. I don’t believe Jesus was saying that all of us have to sell everything we have and give it to the poor.

No, Jesus was looking into the heart of this particular young man, and Jesus saw that the young man had not relinquished his life unconditionally. For him, his status and stuff had become idols. Most troubling of all was the very next line in Matthew’s account:

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. — [Matthew 19:22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2019:22&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)

He couldn’t do it. At the moment of decision, he simply could not surrender everything. He turned his back on Jesus and walked away.

Now we don’t know how this story ended. Who knows, maybe a few months later, a few years later, maybe even a few hours later, this man eventually responded to God’s irresistible grace. Followed Jesus with all he had.

As Richard pondered this story, he felt the Holy Spirit’s quiet voice.

“Are you willing to be open to God’s will for your life?”

He knew that Jesus wanted everything; sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

Quitting his job, selling his house, and moving his whole family to serve at World Vision was uncomfortably equivalent to what Jesus had asked of this other rich young man.

Can you see why he wanted to run for the scissors when he read this story in the Bible?

Richard finally surrendered and embraced God’s Call on his life. He left his successful business career, left everything, to work for World Vision.

He bet the farm.

He embraced his faith, as an inconvenient faith. A costly but rewarding faith.

Now he often speaks with men and women who have heard his story and asked to meet with him, because they too feel they want to go from success to significance, by serving God more directly.

Often they come to him thinking that they want burn the ships and invest themselves full-time in Christian work.

So like Jesus, he asks them a few questions.“Will you relocate? How important is title and salary? Are you willing to work where most needed?”

Invariably people reply with a list of conditions.

“Well, we’re very committed to staying in the area. All of our friends are here, and we have spent years getting our house just right. Our kids are in a very special private school, and we don’t want to move them. We waited six years to join the country club, and now we’re members. We couldn’t take too big of a pay cut and still maintain our lifestyle… But other than that, we’re wide open to serve.”

**You relate at all to these responses?**

I think we all relate, even if our issue isn’t money and success and wealth.

It might be our leisure time, our wants and dreams, our family, our passions, career goals, perhaps our reputation.

Richard says that through this experience he learned this valuable lesson, that the cross, faith is meant to be inconvenient.

That God expects us to serve Him on His terms — not ours.

In fact, He dealt with this clearly in Luke:

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He said to another man, “Follow Me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” — [Luke 9:57-62](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%209:57-62&version=NIV&src=tools#_blank)

I like what Richard says, “Consistent with his encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus was requiring an absolute surrender. To be a disciple means forsaking everything to follow Jesus, unconditionally, putting our lives completely in His hands. When we say that we want to be His disciple, yet attach a list of conditions, Jesus refuses to accept our terms. His terms involve unconditional surrender.”

The cross is quite inconvenient isn’t it?

It often doesn’t fit. Can easily get in the way. Doesn’t fit into our nice neat, safe, predictable lives.

Just look at how inconvenient the cross was in the life of Jesus?

* Left the safe confines of heaven, in order to redeem a broken lost world, lead people back to the Father
* Left His home in heaven, to a place where Scripture says he had no place to lay his head.
* A place of absolute Oneness with the Father, perfect intimacy, for a place where he would be misunderstood, ridiculed, falsely accused and eventually killed.

Not only was the cross Inconvenient for Jesus, we see the same trend in the lives of Jesus’ followers all the way through the gospels.

* Mary is visited by an angel announcing that while she was still a virgin she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.
* Oh, that’s convenient?!!
* Think of how this heavenly promise compromised their nice reputation as good Yahweh followers.
* Mary’s faith had huge consequences…it was an inconvenient faith.
* Think about how “inconvenient” faith was for the Apostle Paul, and how it cost him?
* Ship wrecked, beaten, put in prison, angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, sleepless nights, going without food, bit by a snake, flogged, and eventually cost him his life.

**I sensed as I pondered this word, this story, Jesus inviting me further to what it means to embrace an Inconvenient Faith.**

**You:** Have you turned to God in absolute surrender? Have you bet the farm? What are you still holding onto? What might He be able to do through your life if you let go and followed Him no matter the cost? What is He calling you towards?

These questions apply to me as well. I’ve had to work them through for myself.

Here’s what I have been grappling with.

In order to make it through a very expensive season of our lives, you know that about 2 years ago I took on a very part-time job as property manager at Eagle Run Village, a few hours here and there . The extra income has helped our family immensely. Helped us through an expensive season of our lives.

But lately we sense God asking us to let it go, drop it, and focus all our collective energy on the River. Rather than trust our own efforts to make up short-fall, trust in Him.

Bet the farm so to speak.

Tough decision. I wrestled. Will we make it? What if God doesn’t supply? What if…

But I remember, “Jesus doesn’t come to us on our terms, but on His.”

We want to see the River grow. We want to see the River thrive. We desire to see the River make it’s maxiumum impact for God.

The same thing goes for you, and your personal walk.

We want to see you grow. Thrive in your faith. To reach your maxiumum impact for God.

But to do so will require absolute surrender, from us…and you.

That’s the Kingdom.

At times it might be inconvenient…but isn’t that the way of the cross?

Over the next few CWG’s we will continue looking at some hard sayings of Jesus, and what it means to embrace more fully, the idea of an inconvenient faith.

You can read all of Richard’s story in his book, The Hole in Our Gospel.