

RUN TOWARDS THE WOLF

19 APRIL 2026

SUMMARY

This message explores the profound challenge of deepening one's commitment to Christ beyond initial conversion. Bruce Downes vulnerably shares his personal three-year wrestling with God about whether to continue expanding ministry or maintain the status quo. Drawing from the Easter season and Lenten reflection, he examines how every phase of spiritual maturity requires a fresh "yes" to God, often at greater personal cost. The message emphasizes that while salvation is secure, the degree of our participation in building God's kingdom on earth is a choice involving sacrifice, pain, and laying down our lives. The message culminates in a call for the community to commit to global evangelization, youth ministry expansion, and leadership development, acknowledging that true discipleship means running toward the wolves rather than retreating to comfort.

KEY POINTS

- Every phase of spiritual growth requires a deeper, more costly "yes" to God
- Yesterday's commitment doesn't automatically carry forward; each new season demands fresh surrender
- The spiritual journey moves from external acts of sin to the deeper work of heart transformation
- God respects our decision about how far we're willing to go in discipleship without condemning us
- Pride manifests not only in arrogance but in refusing to let others see our authentic spiritual journey
- Young people need to witness authentic faith lived transparently, not kept private
- The cost of following Jesus increases with spiritual maturity and awareness
- Building God's kingdom requires sacrifice that may include financial resources, time, comfort, and personal ambition
- Community ministry cannot rest on past achievements but must continually expand to fulfill its mission
- True pastoral care requires raising up leaders and creating sustainable structures for growth

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord's Prayer - "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven")
- Luke 14:25-33 (Counting the cost of discipleship)
- John 10:10-13 (The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep)
- The Rich Young Ruler narrative (referenced but not quoted in full)

STORIES:

- Bruce Downes' personal testimony of lying awake with his wife Rosemary years ago, praying about creating faith opportunities for their children, leading to youth ministry that eventually connected four of their five children with their future spouses
- The recent youth camp experience where young people asked "What do I have to do to get into heaven?" echoing the rich young ruler's question
- Parents dropping off children at the youth event, many expressing gratitude for faith-based activities and asking "When's the next one?"
- People who attended youth groups 35 years ago now bringing their own children to the ministry
- Bruce Downes' post-Easter midnight encounter with God, sitting in darkness and receiving clear direction about the cost of moving forward
- The immediate response of buying a plane ticket and traveling to meet with leaders about establishing a leadership center, building communities, connecting with influential people, and borrowing a ship for mercy ministry
- A letter from someone near New York City who discerned the speaker's internal wrestling through the tone and weight of recent messages
- The priest mentor's advice about waking in the middle of the night: always ask "Lord, are you speaking to me?"
- The family meeting where the speaker told his children they would have less material advantages than their friends because the family was choosing to invest in reaching people who don't know Jesus

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work during this Easter season. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

ICEBREAKER

Share about a time when you had to make a difficult decision that required sacrifice. What helped you make that choice?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1: Personal Reflection

1. **The Bus Stop Question:** Bruce asked, "Where do you get off the bus of your spiritual life?" Where in your life might God be asking you to stay on the bus when you'd prefer to get off?
2. **Private vs. Public Faith:** How has keeping faith "private" limited your impact on others, especially younger people or those newer in faith? What would it look like to live more transparently?
3. **Wrestling with God:** Have you experienced a season of wrestling with what God was asking of you? What was that like? How did it resolve (or is it still ongoing)?

Section 2: Understanding Cost (15-20 minutes)

4. **Luke 14:28-33:** Jesus talks about counting the cost before building or going to war. Why does God want us to count the cost? Doesn't that discourage people from following Him?
5. **Age and Awareness:** Bruce mentioned that when we're younger, we move forward with "obliviousness," but over time we become more aware of what following Jesus costs. Do you find this to be true in your experience? How has your understanding of discipleship changed over time?
6. **The Rich Young Ruler:** Jesus didn't condemn the rich young ruler for walking away. What does this tell us about God's character? Does this give us permission to say "no" to God?

Section 3: Community and Mission

7. **Spiritual Mentorship:** Bruce spoke about people who allowed him to see their spiritual journey up close. Who has played that role in your life? For whom could you play that role?
8. **Youth and Legacy:** The message emphasized reaching young people and building something that lasts beyond one generation. What responsibility do

we have to pass faith to the next generation? What specific actions could you take?

9. **The Catholic Guy Vision:** Bruce shared about building communities, leadership centers, works of mercy, and global outreach. What part of this vision resonates with you? Where might God be calling you to contribute?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **Spiritual maturity requires ongoing surrender.** Each new phase of life demands a fresh "yes" to God.
- ✓ **The deeper work is in the heart.** As we mature, the battle shifts from external behaviors to internal attitudes and willingness.
- ✓ **Cost is real, and God honors honesty about it.** We can acknowledge that following Jesus is hard without losing faith.
- ✓ **Our transparency helps others grow.** Living our faith openly—struggles and all—gives others permission to be real with God.
- ✓ **We can say "no" without losing salvation.** God gives us freedom to choose how far we'll go, but greater obedience leads to greater fruitfulness.
- ✓ **Peace comes after surrender.** Bruce experienced profound peace after saying "yes" to what God was asking, even though the cost was great.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week:

Individual Actions:

- **Night Prayer Practice:** Before bed, ask God: "What are you asking of me that I've been avoiding?" Journal what comes to mind.
- **Cost Assessment:** Write down one area where you sense God asking for more. List what it would cost you to say "yes." Pray about it daily.
- **Transparency Experiment:** Share one honest struggle about your faith journey with someone this week.

Group Challenge:

- **Youth Investment:** As a group, discuss one practical way you could collectively support youth ministry or invest in the next generation (time, resources, mentorship).

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together:

Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for us. Give us courage to follow you wherever you lead. Help us count the cost honestly, but also to trust in your goodness. Where you're asking us to say 'yes,' give us strength. Where we're holding back out of fear, give us peace. Use our lives, our resources,

and our willingness to bring your kingdom to earth. We make this prayer in your name, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.