

# South Africa Pastors' Conference

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## Session 5

### Making Disciples: the Cross and Discipleship

Luke 14:25-35

#### Introduction:

Let us read Luke 14:25-35.

<sup>25</sup>Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. <sup>27</sup>And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup>For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- <sup>29</sup>lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This man began to build and was O not able to finish?’ <sup>31</sup>Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup>So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

<sup>34</sup>“Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup>It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Here our Lord presses upon His disciples their responsibility to surrender all to Him. He must be their Lord if He is to be their Savior. If we are presenting salvation rightly to our people, if we are making true disciples of those who profess to know Him, we will press upon them the absolute nature of Jesus' claim to the lives.

But sadly, this does not happen very often. For there are deficient and defective views of salvation and of the definition of the gospel among those who profess to be Christian. For example, there are some have reduced the meaning of the gospel to *the good news of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ*. In other words, well-intentioned Bible believers, with the best of intentions, believe the gospel is the good news of justification by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Now we affirm very strongly that justification is at the heart of the gospel. One cannot have a true, biblical gospel and be wrong on the teaching of justification. But to say that the gospel is equated with and restricted to the justification through faith alone is to reduce the gospel to a narrower definition than what the Bible teaches.

There are others, who take the matter a step farther, which I believe is a departure from the biblical gospel, in that they reduce the gospel to a be a message of forgiveness of sins through faith alone (justification), however, *they define saving faith as mere notional faith*, that is, saving faith is viewed as merely intellectual assent to the doctrine of justification through faith alone. They not only reduce the gospel to the message of justification through faith alone, but they empty faith of its essential biblical moorings, drifting into subtle but serious error respecting what constitutes saving faith. They teach that this kind of “believer”, who “believes only”, becomes justified through faith alone, but it is *through faith that is not evidenced in repentance from sin and obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord*.

This is quite common among evangelicals. I once spoke to a young man who was a sincere and true Christian, who was speaking about his church's efforts at evangelism. He spoke of saving faith. I asked him about the necessity of repentance. He responded that repentance was a matter of the believer's sanctification, but not of the justification of the believer. He had this deficient view of the gospel, in that he, and perhaps his church, teaches that saving faith is merely understanding the doctrine and believing it, but with a "faith" that does not involve repentance. This is error.<sup>1</sup>

But there is an even greater error than this that is common in evangelicalism, among those who claim to believe and follow only the teaching of the Bible as God's Word. There are those who have reduced the gospel to the teaching of faith in Jesus as a mere assent, as the error above, but the "forgiveness" they offer is not principally the forgiveness of God toward guilty sinners who lie under the wrath of God for having lived in defiance of and in transgression of God's law, **but rather their offer of "forgiveness" is a release or liberation from personal guilty feelings**, not actual guilt before God. The thought that they are in need of the atonement of sin before God, in order to be at peace with God, is not a problem for them, after all, "God loves everybody unconditionally." "But your real problem", they argue in agreement with most schools of psychology, "is the guilty feelings that you have within your conscience. You may solve this problem by "accepting Jesus as your personal Saviour." In this way you may no longer feel guilty about yourself, but you may feel loved and accepted. This is not the gospel. And although the problem of guilty feelings is something the true gospel addresses and resolves, **the real problem is our actual guilt before a holy Creator God whom we have ignored and whose laws we have disregarded and transgressed all of our lives**. The true gospel addresses the greatest need of forgiveness of our sins before God Himself through the atoning sacrifice of His Son.

The Gospel is the good news that God brings His salvation from sin to people through faith in Jesus Christ. But biblical salvation involves more than deliverance from the **penalty** of sin (justification), but it also involves the deliverance from the **alienation** of sin (reconciliation and adoption), the ongoing salvation from the **power** of sin (sanctification), and the final salvation from the **presence** of sin (glorification). To reduce the gospel to a message that results in anything less than the full salvation that God sets forth in His Word is dangerous to souls and is weakening the churches of Jesus Christ.

Now again, here our Lord pressed upon His disciples their responsibility to surrender all to Him. He must be their Lord if He is to be their Savior. Our Lord spoke to the multitudes and told them what was necessary if any of them desired to become one of His disciples. He told them, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Here we see that not only does the death of Jesus on the cross save us from the penalty of sin, the cross of Jesus Christ instructs us how to live as believers. The cross is at the heart of what it is to be and live as a Christian. The cross of Christ lays before the believer the pathway to heaven. As Jesus Christ obeyed His Father rather than serving Himself, so we too, are to order our lives. His life of obedience to His Father's will brought Him into conflict to the world about Him, resulting in His crucifixion. Similarly, we are directed as His followers, His disciples, to live as He lived, travelling the same road to heaven that He has travelled before us. The cross of Christ teaches us that we are not to live to ourselves, seeking our own interests primarily, but rather we are to be chiefly concerned about the glory of God and the well-being of people about us, even if it means difficulty and pain for ourselves. The Scripture passage that we read a few minutes ago speak of Christ's attitude toward Himself, the world, and His Father, which is an outlook that we too are to possess as Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Here in Luke 14:25-35 we find ourselves confronted with very challenging words from our Lord Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Jesus set before these people the cost of bearing His cross, which was descriptive of the life of one of His disciples. This section contains an introduction (v.25), two sayings on discipleship (vs. 26, 27), two parables on discipleship (vs. 28-33), and then a concluding metaphor (vs.34, 35). Let us first look at the...

Luke 14:25 is the **introduction to the section**. "Now great multitudes went with Him." The Lord gathered large crowds wherever He went. I suppose if you or I could perform the miracles He performed we would be gathering crowds like He did. But our Lord's concern was not to gather large crowds, He desired

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<sup>1</sup> A very good treatment of this error is addressed in an essay on a movement known as Sandamanianism, which existed in the 1700's. See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans, Their Origins and Successors* (Banner of Truth, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> This is what Paul emphasizes in Philippians 2:1-14.

<sup>3</sup> Some words of which are not unlike His words recorded in Luke 9:21-26.

committed, faithful followers. And so He was faithful to the crowds who gathered about Him and perhaps who desired to travel with Him. He would have them know at the outset what it would cost them to follow Him.

We should be attempting to make the same kind of converts. As we have shown, the Great Commission is not a command merely to “evangelize” as it is regarded in these days, that is, to get people to say they believe in Jesus. The Great Commission of our Lord presses upon us to make *disciples*. That entails bringing people to see who God is in truth, who Jesus Christ is, and what God is doing through Him in history. It involves bringing people to come to God through Christ in repentance and faith, confessing and submitting to Him as Lord. Making disciples involves baptizing converts and teaching them to obey all things that the Lord Jesus ever taught. We are not merely to gather large crowds who say they want to follow Him but have no idea what that involves or any willingness to do so if they really knew what was expected of them. We do a disservice to God and to those who see themselves as believers if we do not fully press upon them the claims of Christ. We desire Christians who are fully aware of the costs of their conversion to Christ. We desire disciples who are fully aware of the difficulty of their decision to follow Him, who commit themselves to follow Christ in faith regardless of the costs.

We see our Lord wanted only these kinds of followers. He desired dedicated followers, not fascinated crowds. He had many “followers” who were *impressed* with Him, but He would have them become fully *committed* and *submitted* to Him. And so, in order to do so, ***He would make these very confronting, challenging, and exclusionary statements, I believe, to drive away any and all that were not fully committed, leaving only those fully dedicated to Him and His cause.***

These are the kinds of people who should comprise church membership--dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ. This, by the way, is what may be determined as a historical Baptist distinctive. Baptists have historically held that only born again persons be admitted to formal church fellowship. We understand that the New Testament churches were comprised of committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and no others. It is true that we cannot infallibly determine who is a true Christian and who is not, but the Lord has given us reasonable ways to make assessments as to the nature of commitment of one who claims to believe on Jesus. When the leaders of a church consider prospective church members, this is principally what we look for--evidence of faith in Jesus Christ and a commitment to follow Him as Lord.

Now again, take note that our Lord addressed the multitudes in this manner. He was attempting to whittle down the crowds of would-be followers to those who would be fully committed to Him. He was thinning the crowds. As when the ancient farmer harvested his wheat, the Lord Jesus sifted His crowds. The farmer would gather great sheaves (bundles of grain stock), huge piles of the stuff, but only the small kernels of grain were of value to him. So the farmer would take the stalks of grain and beat them with sticks to knock the grain from the stalks. He would then throw the heaps into the air and let the wind blow away the useless chaff, only the grain remained, falling to the floor. As I see it, this is what the Lord did with the crowds. He spoke very directly with them, often in a confronting style, designed to drive away all but the dedicated disciples. These alone would follow Him through hardship as well as through prosperity. Only they would follow Him in faith. Only they would enter into His glory, and partake of everlasting life.

I believe that this is foundational to a sound gospel ministry. This kind of practice is foreign to modern church growth theory and practice. We are told that the primary goal is to amass large numbers of nominal believers in our churches rather than committed disciples. We are to make Christianity attractive to the unsaved. We are to present the faith in a way that the unsaved are to see how much better off they would be if they would let Jesus into their lives.

“He will fill their every longing, satisfy their every need.”

“He asks nothing of you but believe.”

“Won’t you believe Him? He wants to bless you, why won’t you let Him?”

We do not see our Lord dealing with the multitudes in this way. The Lord Jesus turned to these multitudes, who thought they wanted to follow Him, and laid before them in quite clear terms the cost of following Him. We will make no apologies for His words nor will we soften them to make them more palatable to our sensibilities. We want people to know His demands. And do not these verses clearly spell them out?

In **verses 26 and 27** we read of **two sayings on discipleship**. Here we see *first*, that if you are to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, ***Christ must be loved above all other loves***. Jesus declared to them, ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own***

*life--he cannot be my disciple.*” Now one not ought read this and say, “I should make a pretty good disciple for I do hate my father and mother, my wife and my children.” That, of course, would be an abuse of the verse. Here, the Lord speaks to the crowds, as abruptly as He did, in order to perhaps sober the enthusiasm of the crowds.

It is the use of the word “hate” which would have shocked the crowds and does shock us. He uses the word to arrest their attention, to emphasize the point that He must be first in their hearts. In comparison to one’s love and commitment to Jesus Christ, all other “loves” pale in comparison. The true Christian is committed to loving and following Jesus Christ above all other things and personal relationships in life. He will turn away from those closest to him if that is what is necessary to follow Jesus.

But it is the manner in which He stated the matter that is so “offensive.” Can you imagine being a Jewish man or woman in that day? You hear of a young rabbi that is passing through town. You have heard much about him. You go to hear him. You gather in the crowd following him. You are caught up with the excitement of the throng. You hear many wonderful things about Him. You, too, are seriously considering aligning yourself with His followers. And then all of a sudden He turns abruptly and makes a statement like this! Do you see how this was a crowd-clearing statement?

But even today, it is a hard saying. At least, I should say, it is for the unregenerate person, the one that has not been the object of God’s grace. A person without grace cannot bear the weight of this statement. “That is an absurd demand.” “I may follow Him, but other things must take precedence. We must not become a radical fundamentalist in this. Let us keep things in proportion.” A person without grace will never submit to following Jesus on these terms and to this degree.

But the child of God, who has been the object of saving grace, who has been born again by the Spirit of God, this saying and all sayings of Jesus is embraced. Oh yes, it is perhaps a “hard saying” to him as well, but he submits. Even though he may not understand the full nature of the demand and the words of Jesus seem abrupt to him also, he nevertheless is committed to follow Jesus no matter the cost, no matter the difficulty. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit has placed in that one’s heart a desire to seek Jesus and follow Jesus. The true believer does indeed love Jesus above all. And even though he loves others as well, say his wife and children, his father and mother, He has purposed by the grace of God to love Christ supremely. This is a work of grace; it is a work that the Spirit of God has done in us. He has shed abroad in our hearts the love for God that we currently possess.

Now it is true that even the true child of God may lapse and struggle with this. Take a wife and a mother, for example. She may tend to elevate the loved ones that are before her eyes to a place that rivals her love for the One whom she cannot see. But words like this quickly jar her to her senses and devotion to Him is reaffirmed. But if asked, if pressed, the statement is made, “Yes, I love the Lord above all other loves.”

Now remember, all non-disciples will be damned. And here is the first demand that the Lord places upon His disciples: Do you love the Lord Jesus more than any other person, and by extension, any other thing on this earth? If you don’t, you cannot be His disciple.

We should point out that to love the Lord more does not mean you are to love others less than what you currently do. It is not disloyalty or diminishing of your love for loved ones to say that you love the Lord more than them. Besides, there is benefit in following of God’s Words that is not initially understood when the believer commits to obey. I believe that God in His wisdom has established the way of faith purposely. For He does not want us to follow Him because we perceive that is how we might be best served. We are to follow Him for Who He is regardless of the benefit that it may bring to us. Jesus once condemned the crowds for following Him not because they desired Him, but because they wanted their stomachs filled, i.e. their immediate needs met (cf. John 6). But it is true that those who follow Jesus will have their needs met. So there is wisdom and blessing in following this instruction of our Lord as well.

It could be assumed by an unbeliever quite easily, but wrongly, that to apply the words of Jesus in Luke 14:26 would mean loving one’s close relatives less than what he presently does. But this is a wrong conclusion. Rather, we would assert that the love of relatives by a disciple of Jesus Christ is greater than his former love for them. When one follows Jesus out of supreme love for Him, love for others does not lessen, but grows stronger, less selfish, purer in kind, more expressive of affection. Believer, do you not love your earthly brother/sister more now than before you were converted? Do you not love your father and mother more deeply, your spouse and children more fully because you see them as God’s gifts to you? I would have a hard time loving some members of my extended family if it were not for the fact that I love God and it spills over to other relations.

It is not disloyalty to say you love the Lord more, and you cannot be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, a true Christian, if you do any less. Christ must be loved above all loves, including love for yourself.

By the way, the present-day emphasis on the need to develop love for oneself is a bunch of psychological hooey. The Bible states clearly that love for oneself is always present and, if anything, is an obstacle to loving God and others. Common sense should tell you this. The problem with people is not that they need to learn themselves more, for “No man ever hated himself” (Eph. 5:29). No the problem is that we need to love others more, and God supremely. (You wives, all the grief that your husband has ever given you, do you think it is because he doesn’t love himself enough? And yet some try and tell you today that is the problem that has to be remedied.)

We next learn that Christ must be followed at all costs. Jesus said, “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (14:27). What does this mean to bear one’s own cross? First, understand that the cross was an implement of death, a cruel agonizing death. Hands and feet were generally tied to the cross, the base of which was set in a hole in the ground. Suffocation was generally the cause of death. Our Lord suffered additional tortures, having been beaten, whipped, fastened to His cross with nails. ***To “bear one’s cross” means that a disciple of Jesus Christ must live as a dead man with respect to his own desires and decisions; he no longer has any say in his life; Christ is His Master.*** He has died to self-will. He denies Himself in that his interest and goals are no longer primary. He no longer sees his life, his family, and his friends as his servants; rather, he is a servant to them. The disciple regards “life in this world as already finished.”

***Second, “to bear one’s cross” means that one is to render absolute obedience to His teaching, following His leading as He had gone before us.*** Now if verse 27 speaks to the person who is initially “coming” to Jesus, then verse 27 speaks to the disciple who must “follow after” Jesus. Christianity is not a sinner’s prayer; it is not a one-time decision to trust something or even a one-time decision to trust Jesus. If there is a decision, it is that “I have decided to follow Jesus.” “I will, as He enables me, do His will, seek His glory, all the days of my life.” Again, if anyone refuses to do this, that one forfeits any hope of salvation. You cannot claim to be a disciple and disregard these words.

We next read **two parables on discipleship.** ***First,*** we have **the partial builder** (14:28-30).

<sup>28</sup>For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- <sup>29</sup>lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This man began to build and was O not able to finish?’

The Lord would have his would-be disciples know right at the outset that they had a great task ahead of them that would require all their effort, their total dedication, and the expenditure of all their resources. It is like a building you want to build. Be aware of the work and costs involved before you start on it, else the unfinished building will be a perpetual monument of your failure. “Finishing” is all-important. Do not set out if you are not aware of what is involved. And once you set out following Jesus, see to it you finish with Him.

**Jonathan Edwards** preached a wonderful sermon on this matter of persevering in faith. It was based on the life of Noah and the thing said of him, “And Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him.” He did not stop midway in the building of the ark to save himself and his family from the judgment of God that came upon the world. Half an ark would not save them from the flood. He finished the ark to the saving of his family. So we too, must finish the life of faith we began.

**John Bunyan** in his classic, ***Pilgrim’s Progress***, makes this point. Christian set out for the celestial city. He had a conversation with one called **Pliable** who had been persuaded to journey with Christian because he heard Christian speak of the wondrous things they would receive from the Lord. The first thing that happened was that they fell into a bog that is called the Slough of Despond. After some struggle, Pliable managed to climb back out and determined to return home. What he said to Christian was this:

At this Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, “Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect betwixt this and our journey’s end? May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone for me.”

And, with that, he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and Christian saw him no more.

By the way, I think that Bunyan must have had this portion of Scripture in mind when he wrote about Pliable, for he tells about what occurred when Pliable reached home:

Now, I saw in my dream, that by this time Pliable was got home to his house again, so that his neighbors came in to visit him; and some of them called him wise man for coming back, and some called him fool for hazarding himself with Christian: others again did mock at his cowardliness; saying, "Surely, since you began to venture, I would not have been so base to have given out for a few difficulties." So Pliable sat sneaking among them. But at last he got more confidence, and then they all turned their tales, and began to deride poor Christian behind his back. And thus much concerning Pliable.

Our Lord does not want His ranks peopled with "pliables." He warned them at the outset that they had a difficult course before them, it is better not to set out than to set out and not finish.

I wonder what the results would be in our big *evangelistic crusades* if at the onset of the invitation the preacher would say, "Now wait, although salvation is free, you cannot earn it with any of your works, but coming to Christ will cost you everything. You must give up all for Him. You must put your family, your friends, your hobbies and sports, your longings and aspirations aside and secondary to this one thing: you must be willing to submit to Jesus Christ as your Lord and follow Him throughout all of life no matter what it may cost you. Now, knowing that, come to Him." Would there be fewer come? I suspect so. Yes, there would be far fewer in our ranks that would claim to be Christian, but we would be stronger for it and our testimony in the world would be far greater. And we would not have the scores of people about who are deluded that they have eternal life aware of their true condition. This is how the Lord dealt with the crowds.

Here are **Charles Spurgeon's** comments on our Lord's Words:

Our Lord Jesus was far too wise to pride himself upon the number of his converts; he cared rather for quality than quantity. He rejoiced over one sinner that repented, but ten thousand sinners who merely professed to have repented would have given him no joy whatever. His heart longed after the real, he loathed the counterfeit; he panted after the substance, and the shadow he could not content him. His fan was in his hand with which to thoroughly purge his floor, and his axe, was laid to the root of the trees to hew down the fruitless. He was anxious to leave a living church like good seed-corn in the land, as free as possible from all admixture. Hence in this particular instance one might even think that he was repelling men rather than attracting them to his leadership; but indeed, he was doing nothing of the kind. He understood right well that men to be truly won must be won by truth, that the truest love is ever honest, and that the best disciples is not he who joins the class of the great Master in a hurry, and then afterwards discovers that the learning is not such as he expected, but one who comes sighing after just such knowledge as the teacher is prepared to give... Nothing is more injurious to a church than a large dilution with half-hearted members, and nothing more dangerous to the persons themselves than to allow them to put on an untrue profession. Therefore did the Master take most care at the time when that care was most needed, that none should follow him under misapprehension, but should be made fully aware of what was meant by being his disciples, so that they should not say afterwards, "We have been misled; we have been beguiled into a service which disappoints us." Unlike the enlisting sergeant, who sets forth all the glories of military service in glowing colors in order to gain a recruit, the great Captain of our salvation would have his followers take all things into consideration before they cast in their lot with him (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 20, pp 109,110).

We read the *second* parable on discipleship of *the defeated king* in Luke 14:31-33.

<sup>31</sup>Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup>So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

What option do you have? Surrender, and do so unconditionally. The option is utter annihilation! We must capitulate. His forces are too great. The thought of resistance is futile. No one will be able to withstand

Him. God has sent His Commander, the Lord Jesus, to take back this world. He will be victorious. We can either surrender and participate in the blessings of His kingdom, or suffer the consequences.

We surrender all unconditionally. He has taken captivity captive. We ourselves have become his spoils. He has won. He is the victor. We belong to Him, and so all that once belonged to us now belongs to Him. The disciple must surrender and always be ready to surrender further, everything He has to His Lord. As one put it, “discipleship means saying a final ‘good-bye’ to one’s possessions.” I am a steward now of His property and must manage it accordingly.

Refusal to respond to the ultimatum means forfeiture of the blessing that is for His people alone. “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

We next read the metaphor of *the savourless salt* in Luke 14:34 and 35.

<sup>34</sup>“Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup>It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Failure to follow Him will result in exclusion of every eternal blessing. A half-hearted disciple has no basis of hope; He is like savorless salt. Cast it away. It is of no use to the Lord. As one commentator explained it, “The closing saying appears to express the ultimate uselessness of the half-hearted disciple, who can expect only judgment” (I. H. Marshall).

### **Conclusion:**

We have just considered a hard passage. But again, it is really only hard for the non-Christian. This would have been a killer for me before I was converted. But when a person is born again by the Spirit of God these very things that Christ taught and commanded become the longings of the heart. Indeed, His commandments are not grievous to the Christian (1 John 5:3). The true Christian hears these things and gives forth an “Amen” from the heart.

And yet, it is so that true Christians can become side-tracked, and they must be brought back to a place where they belong and genuinely desire to be. A passage like this serves us quite well in performing this as we look to Christ to once again set our priorities straight before us.

But to the unconverted person, the words of this passage must be grievous; they can be no less. For these demands are not only unnatural, nor are they naturally desirable, but they are true impossibilities. And the sooner this is recognized the better off that person will be. For it is in a place of desperation, when one is aware of one’s own sinfulness and helplessness to effect any permanent change, that is when the person humbled before God will look to Christ alone both to pardon and to pour out the Holy Spirit so as to effect new life.

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