

While we all profess a belief in God, and would say “yes Lord I will follow you,” one of the things we lose sight of is that Jesus is calling us to a total commitment to following Him. This will be costly. It will require work. But when we put Jesus first in our lives, and are fully committed to following Him and doing what He asks, working together, incredible things can happen.

For more than a decade now, Kristan Hawkins has served as the enthusiastic and relentlessly energetic president of Students for Life of America (SFLA). Recently she was profiled by Dawn Vargo, a freelance writer and a mother of two children. In an article she wrote on her, she writes that on any given day, you might find her addressing campus groups or standing in front of an abortion facility – passionately sharing the real impact of abortion on both women and preborn infants.

Kristan brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the pro-life movement, but for her the pro-life debate is more than just a profession. As a mother raising children with special needs, the value and dignity of every human life is a deeply personal ethic that she lives with every day.

That's because two of her four children – oldest son, Gunner, and daughter, Gracie – have been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF), a deadly genetic disease. For Kristan and her husband, Jonathan, the reality of raising children with a difficult disease like CF has changed dramatically the rhythm of everyday life.

She says that from time to time, those with CF like her kids have to be admitted to the hospital for IV antibiotics to improve lung function and fight dangerous infections..and given the risks of infections, CF requires hours of daily diligence in maintaining a mostly germ-free environment, administering breathing treatments, and caring for the physical needs of stressed bodies in need of calories and medications almost constantly.

Like countless other families whose children have faced an adverse prenatal diagnosis – including CF, Down syndrome or heart defects – the Hawkins have heard doctors offer, suggest, or even encourage them to have an abortion.

“As a mother with children who others would argue should never have been born,” Kristan says, “I know that life has a value even if someone else does not view it as ‘perfect enough ’to survive.”

Life can be exhausting when kids struggle with or are unable to do typical, everyday tasks. Sometimes it feels like an endless string of difficult decisions about their child’s care and future.

Kristan recognizes that not everyone believes in the inherent worth and value of every child. She has experienced the vitriol of people who don’t have the same pro-life ethic. She’s heard others say that “my children should never have been born – that because of their genetic code their lives have less value than others.”

Instead of letting these comments embitter or depress her, they have motivated Kristan to action. She is relentlessly positive in her desire to end abortion. In fact, she has said on many occasions that Americans will see an end to abortion in our lifetime.

In her words this is the most pro-life generation in decades, even more pro-life than their parents,” she says. “This pro-life generation is motivated by human rights concerns and sees the needs of both mothers and preborn infants as equally important.”

Kristan is the first to admit that her pro-life work is a team effort – one she couldn’t take on without Jonathan her husband. She says that he has made more sacrifices than she can count for their family. That’s how it’s all possible.”

Together, Kristan and Jonathan have made significant sacrifices to ensure that their children receive the care they need. One involved relocating halfway across the country –farther away from their extended families and the SFLA headquarters.

Because of Gracie’s and Gunner’s disease, they moved from Virginia to Minnesota to be closer to their care team. They also knew that they didn’t want to enroll them in schools where they would be more exposed to germs, illnesses, etc. So, Jonathan now home-schools their children, ensuring that they get the two to four breathing treatments they need each

day. They've been able to schedule their family around medicines and treatments."

The positive news, she adds, is that cystic fibrosis is now seeing many of its victims survive to 30 and beyond.

And when she's not busy being a mom, she's active in the pro-life movement. President of Students for Life of America and Students for Life Action, she was recruited in 2006 to launch Students for Life of America's full-time operation. Since then, she has built up a small organization made up of a few dozen student groups scattered around the country to a coordinated national team that serves 1,200+ Students for Life chapters in all fifty states and has trained over 100,000 young people. Under her leadership, Students for Life exists to abolish abortion by transforming our culture by recruiting, training, and mobilizing. Vargo closes her article by point out that:

"Sometimes valuing the dignity and worth of every human life comes through leading of an organization like SFLA. Sometimes it comes through the simple, everyday faithfulness of a family committed to caring for their

children, whether that involves regular breathing treatments, hospital stays – or simply saying yes to a Gunner and a Gracie.”

What does it mean to follow God? For some its a big change, like Saint Katharine Drexel, the Philadelphia heiress who gave away millions, became a religious sister, and when asking the pope for more missionaries to help Native Americans had the pope say you'd be good for this, or Mother Teresa who left her teaching position like Robin and went into the poverty of Calcutta to help people. But for others, it might not be something so big, but just the subtle changes that happen in life. God might be saying it's time to step back or retire; it's time to get more involved and to volunteer; it's time to listen more and talk less, or to accept you're not in control of this person's life; it's time to get married or go to the seminary. Whatever it might be, God is talking to us and inviting us to follow Him. And often it might not be easy. But it's an urgent call we are given.

Hearing this Gospel it might at first sound like Jesus is being pretty unreasonable. It's blunt, but the point is that if Jesus is truly the center of our life, then everything else revolves around Him. He's not someone we run to just in case of emergency or when the going gets tough. Rather, He

guides all of our lives, and wants us to be fully committed. We can't say to Jesus "OK, I'll let you into this part of my life, but not my whole life; can you work around my schedule and priorities?" No, rather the call to discipleship is tough, because it is a whole-hearted thing; everything else pales in comparison. It requires being open to wherever God takes us.

The Gospel gives us a few different conversations Jesus has with people that hit this point home.

One is the importance of not letting tribalism take over. Jesus is going through Samaria; a rather dangerous place for Jewish people to go through as Samaritans and Jews did not get along. When James and John, called the "sons of thunder" for their suggestion that they call down fire and brimstone on the people who are rather unwelcoming towards them. Jesus rebukes them. Sometimes in our lives our tribalism can take over with respect to who we know or our political beliefs. But we must remember God calls us to love all people. How many hearts and minds for instance have changed and lives been saved because pro-life people were willing to engage with people who were staunch supporters of abortion, or considering that for themselves? How many people now see the

importance of life because they were treated with love, not hate? When we let God take over, we're able to clearly see this and learn how to better love the people in our life who are the Samaritans and the people we don't like, rather than shout at them or gossip about them. We can be open to God calling us to reach out to help and love others both people we know and people like; the Eucharist also helps us open our eyes to this reality of the universality of God's love.

Jesus then meets someone who says he will follow Him wherever He goes. The response is that foxes have dens, birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. The point is that following me isn't going to be comfortable. Now there's nothing wrong with housing, food, having stuff. But if living a comfortable life becomes more important than following Jesus, something is off. Think of the challenges in our lives that can be uncomfortable; someone serving their country and leaving home to sleep on the ground or in a cot in a barracks and have a drill sergeant yell at them; a parent like Kristan sacrificing so much to provide and help their children, both saying no to material things they'd like and giving so much time to help the kids out of love; or a person sacrificing of their time to go on a mission trip like a number of people do here at Saint Joe's, going to

the Dominican Republic every summer along with the other ministries to the prisons, to Sharing and Caring Hands or to Feed My Starving Children. Kristan sacrifices so much to follow God's call to serve her family and help educate people on life. Are we willing to also sacrifice our egos, our comfort, our time for the greater good?

Jesus then meets a man who says he'll follow him too, but first would it be alright to bury his father. It's certainly a reasonable request and a work of mercy as well. It sounds pretty off-putting the way Jesus says it; shouldn't He seemingly have more compassion? Well Jesus here is not saying family does not matter - He was very close to Mary and Joseph. Rather He uses hyperbole to make a point, that following me is higher than anything in your life, even family. Again, when we have Jesus as front and center we know how to deal with family in right way. It's what helps Kristan to be a dedicated mom and informs her how to love her kids. Because of our love for God, we can recognize when a family member is doing something wrong or self-destructive and intervene and try to help them or to say "this isn't right" because we have the power of the Holy Spirit to give us fortitude and it's important to do the right thing. Because of our love for God, we may have to say "no" to our family's wishes too at times like many of the

saints such as Francis and Claire of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas. Following Jesus is even more important than family concerns, because following Jesus helps us to know how to truly love our families as we should.

Lastly, Jesus meets a man who simply wants to say farewell to his family. What's wrong with that? What child doesn't say farewell when going off to college or moving out of the house? The point here is if you've made a decision to follow Christ, there's no turning back. Sometimes we can get cold feet. We can look back to a former way of life and fall back into old habits. We can say yes Lord I'll follow you but I really also want to do this or that or have it both ways. Much like when a person says yes to marriage and things change, meaning they are home with the family and kids and not out on the town every night or living as if they were still in college, we can sometimes cling to the past - Jesus wants us to look ahead with Him and listen to His guidance in terms of where to go.

Yesterday in our country we all lived to see something that perhaps many thought would never happen, the overturning of Roe v. Wade. How did it happen? Through people who looked ahead when they said they'd follow Christ. Through people who peacefully said prayers at Planned

Parenthood. Who fund raised with pro life corsages on Mother's Day. Who met women who were about to make a tragic choice and offer them alternative; to meet women who had made that tragic choice and remind them they were loved. Robert Casey Sr., the former governor of Pennsylvania, in 1989 signed the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act which led to the Supreme Court Case Planned Parenthood vs. Casey; he died in 2000, but perhaps is smiling in heaven now because that case was also overturned yesterday. A pro-life Democrat, he made national news, including a lot of coverage when he was prevented from speaking at the 1992 convention. But he never backed down. In his words: "What is called for now is very simple ... It's called leadership. Moral leadership of a high order. Gutsy leadership. Tough leadership that doesn't back down, that keeps punching and fighting and keeps persevering until the end is reached over time, as it will be. But leadership also with a strong dimension of generosity and understanding, sending a message of civility and respect for opposing views, a message that bespeaks a true sense of community. Leadership which presents the protection of the unborn child from what it truly is: an imperative that flows naturally from the historical social justice mission of America." How right he is, for it shouldn't be a Republican or Democrat issue, but one of right and wrong. The work on this issue

continues as we now try to convert minds and hearts and educate voters, who now have more power than ever to change laws. But the work of being a Christian also goes on, because as with this issue and so many, it takes going on all in if we are going to bring forth the Kingdom of God. When God called you and me, He did not just call us to punch a clock and fulfill a weekly obligation. He called us to a new, radical way of life - a way of life that is difficult a times and costly. But one that can give us and others true happiness. As Christians, we can never give up, or look back, but must, with our Lord, look ahead. Remember through all of these conversations Jesus has, where is He headed? To Jerusalem, where He will suffer and die for us all out of love, because He is fully dedicated to His mission to love and redeem us. So, Christians, let us journey with our Lord. Jesus was not at home in our world, and if we allow our love for him and for his Gospel to grow, neither will we be. To the world, we'll look extreme, but the truth is, we will be valuing what is truly good, loving what is truly lovable. Let us not fear giving our lives to Jesus; and, meeting Him at this altar, as He gives His life totally to us, may we give our lives totally to Him and follow Him wherever He calls us to go, knowing that when we do, what an incredible difference we can make in this world.