

## HARD TEACHINGS

*On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?” (John 6:60, NIV)*

WHEN YOU’RE A COMPETITIVE PLAYER, the lessons of the game are sometimes harsh. What, we might ask ourselves, *does a player like Adam Scott—a major champion and many time winner—learn from a weekend backpedal like he suffered at Bay Hill last Sunday?* Surely he has learned everything there is to be learned in the game. And surely there was no delight in watching Matt Every blow right past him.

But lessons come at every stage of life. Especially when we watch the growing pains of young people, it may seem like we have known all we know now nearly all of our lives. Not true. We layer in “obvious” bits of missing knowledge every year.

A reading of the Gospels gives us this sense in rapid repetition. The disciples were constantly being schooled by what they saw Jesus do and heard him say. And they seemed to be caught off guard more often than not. Sometimes they wisely kept quiet about it.

On the occasion of his teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum in John 6, however, more than the usual crowd of followers were on hand. The Twelve were there, but we know from verse 66 that “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” because of the teaching he did there. We don’t know which disciples asked the question of today’s passage: “Who can accept this hard teaching?” But we can speculate that those who did ask were likely speaking for many.

In that time and place, Jesus’ hard teaching included this statement: “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” Some hearers’ minds went to cannibalism, a practice despised even among the pagans. Others may have more rightly recognized the all-in nature of commitment that Jesus was requiring. However they saw it, Jesus’ words were demanding much of them, as he did with the rich young ruler whom he told to sell all his possessions in order to follow.

The teachings of Jesus, in Scripture’s past and in our present, will often be found stark. And we may find ourselves asking, “How can I accept this?” We will stick around only if we are confident like Peter that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life and that his teaching can always be trusted (John 6:68).

**Opening questions** What is something new you have learned recently that you probably should have known before? Why is it so frustrating to learn something “the hard way?”

**READING** John 6:43-69, Galatians 2:20, Luke 18:18-29

### Jesus’ teaching about his flesh and blood

What do you think made Jesus’ teaching in John 6 so repulsive to many of his listeners? Do you think people turned away because they did not understand or because they understood all too well?

What do you think Jesus meant by his words? How does Galatians 2:20 help us gain a grasp of what Jesus likely looked for from his disciples? What important connection is made between Galatians 2:20 and John 6:56?

### The rich young ruler

What did Jesus require of the rich young ruler in Luke 18? Why did he demand this response? What is Jesus trying to carve out of your life that deters you from following him? How does verse 27 give you hope in your following Jesus?