



**23** And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. **27** But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

- Luke 9:23-27

# Day 1

## Psalm 71:15-16

*15 My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,  
of your deeds of salvation all the day,  
for their number is past my knowledge.*

*16 With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come;  
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.*

Pause to reflect on the righteousness of God.

## Connecting Passage:

*7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

*8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

- Romans 8:7-8

## Lesson:

Verse 23 tells us that all believers in Jesus must “deny themselves.” It is important to notice the scope of what Jesus is saying; “whoever” would be a follower of Jesus “must” comply with these directions. They are not reserved for a special class of super-disciples or martyrs, and they are not optional.

We might think of self-denial in terms of refraining from luxuries, as when a person on a budget must deny herself some frivolous purchase or a person on a diet decides to deny himself dessert. But Jesus is calling his people to something much more radical.

John Stott comments on this passage: “To deny ourselves is to behave towards ourselves as Peter did towards Jesus when he denied him three times. The verb is the same (*aparneomia*). He disowned him, repudiated him, turned his back on him. Self-denial is not denying to ourselves luxuries such a chocolates, cakes, cigarettes, and cocktails (although it might include this); it is actually denying or disowning ourselves, renouncing our supposed right to go our own way. To deny oneself is to turn from the idolatry of self-centeredness.”

## Question:

How do you need to turn from the “idolatry of self-centeredness”?

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## Hymn:

*Tune my heart to sing in wonder,*

*of how You love me,*

*tune my heart*

- “Center My Life” Austin Stone Worship

## Prayer:

Turn my heart to sing praises to you, thus ridding me of the praise of self.

# Day 2

## **Psalm 95:6-7**

*6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

*7 For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.*

Spent time considering how we are the sheep of the hand of God.

## **Connecting Passage:**

*20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

- Galatians 2:20

## **Lesson:**

When Jesus says that anyone who wants to be a disciple of his must pick up their cross, he is speaking in the starkest of terms. The Romans required the condemned to carry the horizontal piece of their cross to the execution site; a man who was carrying his cross was on a one-way trip to death. Jesus is not talking about physical death, though it's possible that following Jesus in this radical way could cost you your life. Instead, Jesus is talking about dying to your old way of life and crucifying the old, self-centered way of living. Following Jesus is like a kind of death because every area of a disciple's life is radically changed: our finances, ambitions, sexuality, entertainments, and relationships must all be brought into conformity with the wishes of Jesus. As a follower of Jesus makes the daily choice to pick up his cross, every part of that day will be impacted.

Jesus frames his call of discipleship in extreme terms, using words like "whoever" and "must," and in so doing he excludes anyone who wants some other kind of discipleship. It is a daily activity — not merely a decision made once and left to the wayside. Picking up one's cross is the most extreme way to describe the self-denial required of disciples. If we take Jesus' word seriously, we have to admit that much of what passes for Christianity today will eventually be revealed as a diabolic counterfeit.

## **Question:**

How can a Christian carry their cross and yet be so joyful?

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## **Hymn:**

*The world behind me*

*The cross before me*

*No turning back*

- "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" Sadhu Sundar Singh (extra credit: look up the story behind this song)

## **Prayer:**

God, I am your handiwork. Shape, mold, and make me into whatever you desire.

# Day 3

## Psalm 128:1-2

*1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,  
who walks in his ways!*

*2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;  
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.*

Consider God's blessings on those who are obedient.

## Connecting Passage:

*5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."*

- Exodus 19:5-6

## Lesson:

Jesus' third call in Luke 9:23 is to "follow him." All three verbs in v.23 are imperatives, which means they are commands. However, only the last one "follow me" is a present-tense verb. This means that discipleship in general involves the fundamental commitment of self-denial and bearing one's cross, while the call to follow Jesus is constant, growing out of the base commitments. Those commitments meant condemnation from the world for many in that age. A decision for Jesus does not bring automatic rejection today. If anything, we suffer from an opposite issue. It is possible to operate in such a closed Christian circle that one lacks all contact with the outside world and thus misses the rejection of the world that this passage assumes will be present. One can experience a type of institutionalized Christianity that assumes one is born a believer or one that stays so cloistered to protect one's moral identity that one never really engages those in the world. Such a Christianity will never face the discipleship tensions Jesus describes here. But such a protected kind of discipleship is not what Jesus asks his followers to undertake when he calls them to bear their crosses daily. Jesus assumes those who are his will indeed represent him in the world. He also knows the world will react. Yet even those who do undertake his mission faithfully today often do not face persecution that early Christians endured.

But to note that faith today often does not involve persecution does not mean that discipleship is without cost or ceases to exist. The world is just as potent and powerfully present today as it was then. The call for us to walk differently from the walk of the world is just as essential an attribute of discipleship as it was then. A walk of integrity, purity, faithfulness, and humble service should be just as evident today as it was in Jesus' day.

## Question:

How do we often misunderstand the connection between the call to "follow Jesus" and to obey him?

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## Hymn:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;*

*Praise him, all creatures here below;*

*Praise him above, ye heavenly host:*

*Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

- "Doxology" Thomas Ken

## Prayer:

You have called us into a higher obedience, a wholistic worship. Compel me to follow you in all my ways.

# Day 4

## **Psalm 145:1-3**

*1 I will extol you, my God and King,  
and bless your name forever and ever.*

*2 Every day I will bless you  
and praise your name forever and ever.*

*3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,  
and his greatness is unsearchable.*

Reflect on your verbal praise of our God.

## **Connecting Passage:**

*37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

- Matthew 10:37-38

## **Lesson:**

There are some out there who have chosen to do away with the traditional titles for their faith— Christian, Evangelical, or Southern Baptist each have their own political or cultural baggage that potentially make a person unfavorable in the eyes of many. To combat this some have opted for phrases like “Christ-follower,” “Reformed,” or “Post-Evangelical” to either ease the blow or to more accurately describe their belief system. This does not mean that they are necessarily ashamed of those groups but rather that words have baggage that might disallow the furthering of a relationship.

I do not believe something like this is what Jesus had in mind in Luke 9:26. The person who is ashamed of Jesus and his words is a different person altogether. This person is ashamed of what Jesus has to say about sin, they are frustrated with the exclusive claims that Christ makes about his saving power, and they are annoyed that he does not work exactly like they would want him to.

So do we fall into that category? Are you afraid to boldly call out sin when asked what you believe? Do you hedge around the answer when asked how God could send a “good person” to Hell? Are you annoyed with Christ when he doesn’t give you the health and wealth that you think he promises (hint... he doesn’t)? We cannot be ashamed of the saving power of Christ. We cannot be ashamed of the obedient life he calls us to live. We cannot be ashamed of the cross he calls us to bear.

## **Question:**

Are you tempted to be ashamed of Jesus or his words?

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## **Hymn:**

*What patience would wait as we constantly roam*

*What Father, so tender, is calling us home*

*He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor*

*Our sins they are many, His mercy is more*

- “His Mercy is More” Matt Papa

## **Prayer:**

Give me mercy when I have turned my gaze. Show me the grace to redirect it back on you.

# Day 5

## Psalm 96:10-13

*10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!*

*Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;*

*he will judge the peoples with equity."*

*11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;*

*let the sea roar, and all that fills it;*

*12 let the field exult, and everything in it!*

*Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy*

*13 before the Lord, for he comes,*

*for he comes to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world in righteousness,*

*and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Prepare your heart to worship God as King.

## Connecting Passage:

*33 And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. 34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"*

- Matthew 9:33-35

## Lesson:

Hopefully you've read the Luke 9 passages a few times this week. Maybe, if you're like me you read the first few lines and realized you knew the passage so you skimmed it quickly. So let's all turn back to the front page and read it one more time.

Did you catch that last verse? Did it strike you odd? Jesus says that some of them standing there that day won't die before they see the kingdom of God. That seems like a bold proclamation. We're left with a couple options for what he means. 1) Jesus was just mistaken and wrong (this is clearly wrong based on all that we know about Jesus). 2) Jesus is alluding to the Transfiguration, which is a display of the kingdom and the promise that Jesus will one day come in full glory (it's also the very next passage). 3) Jesus is referring to the the kingdom that is inaugurated at Pentecost when the Spirit descends and falls on the believers.

Whether it is point #2 or #3 (again, it obviously cannot be #1 since Jesus is perfect) it does not matter. His overarching point is that you cannot be this close to the coming of the kingdom and continue living as if it were a fairy tale. If anything, this current world is the place that is not your home. We must begin to think of eternity being the ultimate reality for which we must plan.

## Question:

What are you living for? How long will the things you're living for last?

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## Hymn:

*Come set Your rule and reign*

*In our hearts again*

*Increase in us we pray*

*Unveil why we're made*

- "Build Your Kingdom Here" Rend Collective

## Prayer:

Let me sing to my King when everything else has fallen away. You are my God and my King!