

**THE TRUE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP
DO WE REALLY WANT TO SEE GOD DO
A SUPERNATURAL WORK IN AND AROUND US?
Luke 9:23-26**

The Lord was teaching right after He fed the five thousand. People like to come to Jesus as long as they are “going to get something for nothing!”. He knew the heart of mankind—how selfish we are and how our motives are not usually good. He was demonstrating His power so all would understand who He was. But the call to follow Him was a very serious thing and it was not all about “getting stuff,” having a good show, feeling good and doing what “feels good to you!” He asked His disciples in verses 18-22 “Who do you say that I am?”; and that was when Peter answered “you are the Christ of God!” He then mentioned that the Son of Man must “suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” So, Jesus was laying down what was going to be involved if anyone wanted to be a follower of His. Now I want to mention here that even this concept is foreign to us; that is the concept of “follower.” We tend to focus on the act of believing or trusting in Jesus for salvation. And we separate that from following. But the Bible does NOT do that at all. The act of following is always present in the act of believing or trusting. So, what we see here is not for some super-spiritual persons. This is for anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

I. JESUS GIVES US THE DESIRE TO “COME AFTER” HIM

II. LET HIM DENY HIMSELF

First of all, we have to understand what our “SELF” is. This is our natural man, the person who functions in the world and has its own reason, its own will, its own thinking, and can easily go along on its own without input from God! It is our FLESH—our carnal nature, that flows along with the world making its own way and not making any waves in the culture, etc. It is often what many call a CULTURAL CHRISTIAN. That is, a Christian just because it is the thing to do because that is what people do! It is what your family did, it is what your friends did, it is what a large group in the community did, etc. But that day is quickly dying, and I am not sure that some of that may not be a good thing. Because Jesus is speaking here of a drastic change in the direction of one’s heart and life. “It is a rejection of life based on self interest and self fulfillment.” (Robert Stein, *New American Commentary on Luke*, p. 279).

We need to realize that SELF is a lot of our natural thinking and acting. It is the world and the priorities of the world. Now these are sometimes necessary things to live life. They are not bad in and of themselves, but they can be controlling and can drive our lives without any appreciable presence of God. There will come a time when doing church (following Jesus) is not glamorous! The ones who will last will do so because of a life that has practiced this principle. Today, there are some young people who will go to the latest and greatest church that has the best show in town. Jesus specifically spoke THIS PASSAGE TO HELP HIS POTENTIAL FOLLOWERS KNOW THAT

IT ISN'T ABOUT THE SHOW! It is about the Cross. Here is what one commentator said:

What does all this mean for us today? Self-denial. Quit looking for miracles and healing. Quit centering your attention on things that enhance and please you. Focus on Christ. Let him create a daily relationship with you. Find out what he wants you to do every day. Do it! Do not expect to win popularity contests, fame, fortune, or success. Be ready to suffer rejection, pain, and death he suffered. His lifestyle leads to that. Only as you lead this lifestyle can you learn who the Messiah really is. Only this lifestyle leads to eternal life in heaven. Take up your cross and follow him to the death. Then you will find he is the life. (Trent Butler, *Holman New Testament Commentary on Luke*, p. 146)

“To ‘deny’ yourself means to say ‘No’ to yourself and ‘Yes’ to God. Paul is not talking about asceticism—forgoing earthly possessions, not eating certain foods, ignoring the world, etc. To say it differently, the process of denial is ‘to humbly submit my will to God.’ It is to go through life repeating the words that Jesus said the night before he died. When he was praying in the garden, he said to God his Father, “Not my will but yours be done.” It is what millions of Christians have prayed for centuries when they repeat what we call the “Lord’s Prayer.” “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).” (from the Bill Mounce Bible notes)

When we deny self regularly, we will look less and less like the world. Sometimes people may think that will make them look a bit weird (*show funny slide here*). But, in reality, the Lord will use your “good weirdness” to draw people unto Himself.

Denying self is the negative side of the coin. There is a positive side. Although this side leads to DEATH to SELF and DEATH to an old unproductive life, it is also the ONLY WAY TO HAVE LIFE!

III. TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

This is where things get a little more tough! Jesus is not talking about a wonderful walk in the park here! He IS talking about having such intimate fellowship with Him and His purpose for your life that you do experience the Cross of Christ personally in your life. The principle is death that precedes LIFE! The Cross is always the pathway to LIFE!

Taking up the cross in our lives is a proactive thing. It involves a willing obedience to act in service to Jesus and others no matter what the cost. It is being consumed by His mission of witnessing to others and investing in them to help them walk with Jesus. But BEFORE that can happen, the Cross also means moving towards Jesus in intimacy—growing in such a way that there is a gradual but noticeable life change. In other words, the focus is NOT ON DOING BUT THE FOCUS IS ON JESUS HIMSELF. It is a personal act of your heart and obeying BECAUSE YOU LOVE HIM.

IV. TAKING UP YOUR CROSS REQUIRES OBEDIENCE IN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

1. BIBLE INTAKE – Regular, Systematic
2. PRAYER – have a prayer list, do not overdo it, just be real and give your heart to Him.

3. WORSHIP
4. EVANGELISM
5. SERVING
6. STEWARDSHIP
7. LEARNING
8. FASTING
9. JOURNALING
10. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBLE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS
11. SILENCE AND SOLITUDE
12. PERSEVERANCE IN THE DISCIPLINES

V. TAKING UP YOUR CROSS MEANS NOT RESPONDING IN YOUR OWN WISDOM TO THE TOUGH SITUATIONS IN LIFE

“What does it look like to live out this prayer? Someone hurts you. Your natural reaction is to lash back, to get angry. But the path of discipleship is “not my will but yours.” It is humbly submitting my will to God’s will. Instead of getting angry, we realize that God is calling us to forgive even our enemies. A verse that is becoming more and more important to me is Paul’s instructions to the church in Ephesus. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (4:32). When I am hurt, I am called to submit my will to God’s will and follow his example. This is what it means to “deny” yourself. Now, I don’t always do it. Sometimes I like to reword Jesus prayer: **“not your will but mine be done.” [yikes!]** But that’s not what Jesus said.

What does it mean to “daily take up your cross”? The cross was a horrid symbol of pain, shame, and death. A

person hung on it, naked, until his skeletal structure collapsed and he suffocated to death, without air and with his body drowning itself in its own fluids. Every day we are to live in such a way that it is apparent to everyone that we have died to ourselves, to our selfish ways and ambitions, and live for God. Another translation words the verse: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me" (NLT)." (from the Bill Mounce Bible notes)

VI. TAKING UP THE CROSS IS A DAILY ACT OF ONES HEART AND LIFE – INWARD AND OUTWARD

This is a present continuous tense here. We do GREAT VIOLENCE to Jesus and His Word when we reduce the Christian life to meeting together on Sundays and having Christian friends! There is SO MUCH MORE involved. This is personal BUT IT IS NOT PRIVATE. The whole world will know that you are different and your priorities are different. Again, some will be drawn towards Christ and some not. That is not your issue; it is God's! Taking up your Cross in outward service will follow as you mature in the spiritual disciplines (especially the intake of the Word and Prayer).

When we think about TAKING UP OUR CROSS, we MUST think about WHY Jesus took up His cross. He died for me and you! Jesus died a selfless death for us that we might have THE way to the Father. He died to take our judgment that we might have His righteousness instead! In other words, Jesus' Cross was because of OTHERS—other people and not Himself. My dear friends, please please hear me today. This church is not about YOU! In fact, I submit to you this: If you are not willing

to sacrifice anything for other people to be saved and follow Jesus Christ, I seriously doubt whether you yourself are even saved. There, I said it! If we call ourselves Christians we certainly ought to be able to demonstrate something of the Spirit of Christ in going to the Cross for the World! Jesus did not call us to some "mambsi pambasi Christianity" that does not require anything of us. He called us to Himself and to actively follow Him DAILY. And when Jesus calls a man "He bids Him to come and die" (Deitrich Bonhoeffer).

VII. TAKING UP THE CROSS DAILY IS THE WAY TO JOY AND LIFE AND VICTORY OVER SIN – THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE – THIS WAY IS THE WAY OF SWEET FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LIVING CHRIST! HALLELUJAH!

The great paradox is this: when any of us practices self denial and cross-bearing service FOR OTHERS—THAT OTHERS MIGHT KNOW JESUS AND GROW IN HIM—when we do this we find the Greatest Joy Possible! The Cross is spoken of as the Joy that awaits! I am asking you to join me in this wonderful journey towards genuine life change: OUR LIFE AND OTHERS! Let's be about denying self and cross bearing and actively following Jesus. The JOY and VICTORY of Jesus Christ can be ours today. The Lord knows your heart. Identify the sin holding you back. Repent and join Jesus in His work. His yoke is easy and His burden is light! Come to Jesus, follow Him every day!