

Unashamed
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Luke 9:18-26

The other day Susan posed a profound question: "What would have happened if our current society had been confronted with something like World War II?" I agreed with her point. Have we as a society become so self-centered that we would allow democracy to fail and tyranny to spread because we are unwilling to deny our own wants and desires for a greater cause? A truth: The best and most worthwhile things in life require self-sacrifice; they come with a cost.

That also applies to living life in Christ. Salvation is free but being a fully devoted follower of Christ comes at a cost. Jesus spelled out the cost, and to make sure we understand, it's recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke.) Jesus said, *"If you want to be my follower you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow me, and do all this unashamed of being my follower."* What does that mean? How do I do it? That's what we'll learn in Luke 9:18-26.

Big Idea: Jesus expects His followers to forsake all else for Him, or as I like to say, *"Give Him the keys and the driver's seat to every part of our lives."* It may seem like a big sacrifice, but it comes with an amazing eternal payoff!

Let's begin by reading our text asking what it says, what it means, and how it should change us this week:

¹⁸ Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" ¹⁹ And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." ²⁰ Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." ²¹ And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." 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."

- Jesus gave a "pop quiz" to his disciples: Who do YOU say I am?
- We can't follow a Savior we don't know. The first step to eternal life is acknowledging and confessing as Peter did: *"You are the Christ of God."*

- Jesus is the anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of the world. There is no salvation without believing and confessing that truth.
- Once Jesus established His identity, He told his disciples how He would fulfill His role as the “Son of Man:” He would “suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised” from the dead, all to pay for the sins of mankind.
- We know those facts well but it was shocking news to His inner circle.
- Jesus needed them to know what was coming for Him, but He also needed them (and us) to know the implications those facts would have for those who would surrender to Him as His followers.
- Verse 23: Jesus said, “...*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*” Let’s unpack that.
- “Come after me” and “follow me” mean becoming a “disciple.” Wiersbe says, “The closest contemporary word to “disciple” is probably “apprentice.”ⁱ This isn’t just about accumulating knowledge; it’s gaining “hands on” learning from our teacher (Jesus) and putting it into practice.
- You’ll notice I tend to use the expression, “follower of Christ.” There’s nothing wrong with “Christian” or “believer” per se but those terms can be misconstrued. Saying I am a “follower of Christ” leaves no doubt that I am publically stating I have surrendered to live by what He has taught.
- “The phrase “What would Jesus do?” (WWJD), became popular...in the late 1800s [because of the] book by Charles Sheldon entitled, “In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do.” The phrase had a resurgence in the US and elsewhere in the 1990s.”ⁱⁱ
- Sheldon’s question is powerful but let’s augment it with another, “*Will I do what would please Jesus regardless of what it costs me?*”
- This begs the next question: “*How can I know what would please Jesus?*”
- It is revealed in His word, Holy Scripture, and it is by the prompting of His Spirit living inside His followers. The two (scripture and His Spirit) will never contradict each other.
- Following Jesus means living to please Him, but as our creator, Jesus knows how hard that is for us natural-born rebels so He said we would have to “deny self.” What does “deny self” really mean?
- Does it mean deny myself things, comfort, and pleasure?
- Does it mean wearing a scratchy “hair shirt” and living an ascetic, monastic life with almost no worldly goods and no fun?
- No, this is not about denying myself things. The NLT paraphrases “deny self” well: To be Jesus’ follower, “...*you must give up your own way.*”ⁱⁱⁱ
- In other words, we must substitute “my way” for Jesus’ way.
- Let me illustrate the challenge: Our two-and-a-half-year-old grandson Knox’s default answer to most any direction is “no.” “*Let’s put on your shoes. No.*” “*It’s time to go home. No.*” “*Eat the rest of your meat. No.*” “*Stay downstairs, Granddad is working. No.*” He doesn’t scream it in defiance. He just matter-of-factly says, “no.” Now, in most cases he will comply if you persist, but his first reaction is “no.” Why is that?

- From birth our natural self is focused on its own agenda. When Mama says, *“Let’s put on your shoes,”* that is an interruption to whatever play he’s involved in and his little, natural self automatically pushes back with, “no.” Mama knows what is best but he wants to play. He wants HIS way.
- To summarize, denying self as a Christ-follower means when what I want and what Jesus wants are in conflict, Jesus wins!
- Some teach that following Jesus will solve all your problems and bring you stress release and a growing bank account. Life will be a “breeze!”
- I don’t know what “Bible” they’ve been reading but Jesus said the opposite. He said, “daily” you will have to “take up your cross.”
- What does that mean? First, here’s what it doesn’t mean.
- People talk about hardships in life and say, *“Well, that’s my cross to bear!”* That’s not what Jesus means by “take up your cross.”
- He also didn’t say take up “His cross.”
- We said last week that Jesus paid a debt He didn’t owe because we owed a debt we couldn’t pay. That was His cross. So, what is our cross?
- Philippians 3:10 says, knowing Jesus means “sharing” his sufferings.^{iv}
- What is taking up OUR cross in order to share His sufferings?
- Jesus was speaking symbolically. Carrying a literal cross meant shame, suffering, and death. Scripture and history tell us that Jesus’ closest disciples suffered and most of them died violently because of their faith.
- Most of us won’t face death but there is other suffering for Christ-followers.
- In Luke 12 Jesus said families might be divided because of following Him.
- One commentator wrote: *“How different from the typical Gospel presentation! How many people would respond to an altar call that went, ‘Come follow Jesus, and you may face the loss of friends, family, reputation, career, and possibly even your life’? The number of false converts would likely decrease! Such a call is what Jesus meant when He said, ‘Take up your cross and follow Me.’”^v*
- Taking up our cross doesn’t mean all these bad things WILL happen to us. The question is: “Am I willing to follow Jesus regardless of the consequences in this life – even consequences like those?”
- Looking at verses 24 and 25 in the NLT: ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.
²⁵ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?^{vi}
- Is this about the unsaved who choose this world over Christ? If an unsaved person rejects Christ they will lose their soul in eternity (Jn. 3:36)
- What about those who profess Christ? Was Jesus saying a truly saved follower could lose our salvation because we’re trying to cling to the things of the world? No, that would mean our efforts (to be good) or failings (being bad) are more powerful than His saving power. (Jn. 10:28)
- Jesus was saying if His followers try to cling to the comforts offered in this world it will cost us in terms of the glorious life He offers.

- Warren Wiersbe writes: *“Remember, He was instructing His disciples, men who had already confessed Him as the Son of God. He was not telling them how to be saved and go to heaven, but how to save their lives and make the most of their opportunities on earth. “Losing your soul” is the equivalent of wasting your life, missing the great opportunities God gives you to make your life count. You may “gain the whole world” and be a success in the eyes of men, and yet have nothing to show for your life when you stand before God.”^{vii}*
- Jesus words in verse 26 speaks to that day when His followers will stand before God at the Judgment Seat of Christ: *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels.”^{viii}*
- What a sobering thought! Imagine Jesus saying, *“I died a horrible death so you could have eternal life and though you trusted me to receive that life, you were too ashamed to be counted as my follower.”*
- When our daughter Annie was in elementary school our church staged the children’s musical, “Nic at Night” based on the story of Nicodemus who came secretly to Jesus because he was afraid of crossing the Pharisees.
- I loved what one of the musical numbers taught our kids with these lyrics:
*“Don’t be secret disciples hiding in the night
 Don’t be secret disciples, Come into the light
 Get rid of your disguise, Get smart, get wise
 Let the whole world know whose you are!”^{ix}*
- That is GOOD theology! A fully devoted follower of Christ won’t be a secret disciple!

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- With key points like self-denial, taking up our cross, losing our life to save it, suffering and death, I realize this isn’t a cheerful, upbeat lesson.
- Jesus’ teaching didn’t gloss over the hard parts of the Christian life. He taught us what we need to know to live for our good and His glory.
- The Life Application Study Bible poses a good question for reflection:
“Do you think of your relationship with God primarily in terms of what’s in it for you (which is considerable) or in terms of what you can do for him? Are you willing to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him? Anything less is not discipleship; it is merely superficial lip service.”^x
- As we said at the beginning: Jesus expects His followers to forsake all else for Him, or as I like to say, *“Give Him the keys and the driver’s seat to every part of our lives.”* It means substituting His will in place of ours. When what I want and what Jesus wants are in conflict, Jesus wins. It may seem like a big sacrifice, but it comes with an amazing eternal payoff!
- This week let’s ask Him to reveal to us any area of our lives that are not fully surrendered to pleasing Him and to help us to deny self so we can be His fully devoted follower.

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- ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 207).
- ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_would_Jesus_do%3F
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 9:23). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Php 3:10). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^v <https://www.gotquestions.org/take-up-your-cross.html>
- ^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 9:24–25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vii} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 140). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{viii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 9:26). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{ix} Copyright © 2021 Kathie Hill Music, LLC.
- ^x Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 164257-164259). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.