

The Call to Discipleship

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Date: 02 June 2024

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much for having me and our friends from Atlanta here. Been really enjoying your hospitality from Keith and James and the members here.

It's only been three days since we've been in Edinburgh now. Been enjoying the city a lot, especially just the amount of walking that you have to do here, which is healthy. It's a good thing. My Apple Watch has been giving me shout-outs that I didn't know existed. I got all kinds of medals yesterday for walking. I got a gold coin or some kind for walking 81 minutes straight, which in Atlanta, Georgia, is an eternity.

So I think another few more days here, I'm definitely going to be going home with more medals. I'm going to, and as you can tell, yes, I am from the States, so I don't have the beautiful accent that James has.

And I don't know if you knew this, but in the States, if you're somebody with a British accent or a Scottish accent, your credibility skyrockets. So I don't know if the reverse is true, where if you lack such an accent here, your credibility goes down.

[1 : 29] I hope that's not the case. But either way, you know, the good news is God's word is true, whatever accent it's spoken in. So I do want to go into God's word with you and read with you one verse.

And I just happen to have a ESV Bible. So I'm going to read you that one verse from the ESV Bible. I think the NIV that you use is a fine translation. I just happen to have the ESV.

So let me read that for us, and I think it will be also up on the screen as well in the ESV, Luke chapter 9, verse 23. So as I read this, let's give it our attentive hearing, because this is God's word. And he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

May God bless the reading and preaching of his word. The gospel of Luke is structured in a way where the first nine chapters are about revealing who Jesus is.

[2 : 48] So you get to see Jesus is the calm in your storm. Jesus is the source of your blessedness, or that's a biblical word for your happiness. He is the true Lord of the Sabbath.

He's the giver of true rest. These wonderful revelations of who Jesus is, chapters 1 through 9. Here is the transition point that Luke is making now, in the middle of chapter 9.

And it's a transition that he's, in a way, inviting you and me to consider making. And it's this. Having learned these things about Jesus, what will you do with him?

Maybe more pointedly, for those of you who grew up learning about Jesus and kind of living in the chapters 1 through 9, and having been revealed to you, right, who Jesus is, the question Luke is asking now is, will you go beyond knowing about him to actually following him?

And what does that mean? What does it mean to follow him as his disciple? I think Jesus explains it all so simply and yet so thoroughly in this single verse, chapter 9, verse 23.

[4 : 03] Every phrase in this verse is important, so I would like to chew on this slowly with you. And I think we can break this down into three parts and consider how Jesus' call to discipleship is, one, it's a call to go after something.

Two, it's a call to deny. And three, it's a call to daily carry. These three. It's a call to go after. It's a call to deny. And a call to daily carry.

Let's go through these one at a time. Point number one, the call to discipleship is a call to go after something. The NIV says, whoever wants to be my disciples, and I think that's a fine translation of what it says in the Greek, that is, if anyone will come after me, or go after me, because that's essentially what a disciple is.

A disciple is somebody who goes after someone. And if you're going after someone, you're a disciple. But I think it's interesting that Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, because before that tells you, you ought to go after Jesus, I think it tells you something even more basic about yourself and me.

And that is, you are someone who goes after things. Everybody in this world, even if you're not going after Jesus, is going after something.

[5 : 28] We're creatures that go after stuff. We latch on to things. We get hooked on things. We commit ourselves to things.

And we get consumed by things. We must. Why? I think, I think C.S. Lewis is a popular author around here, so I may quote him. I think he explains this really well in his little book, *The Weight of Glory*.

There's an excerpt that goes like this. God has given us the morning star already. You can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want?

Ah, but we want so much more. The poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though God knows even that is bounty enough. We want something else, which can hardly be put into words, to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

In other words, you're wired in such a way, human beings are wired in such a way, as to not just chase after something we consider to be ultimately beautiful and glorious, but we're wired to go after it until we enter into it, until we're one with it.

[6 : 49] We're wired to receive it into us, as Lewis says, to bathe in it and become a part of it, if you believe it to be a beautiful and glorious thing.

And one way people manifest this is by putting on maybe a certain football team jersey, or hang a certain work of art in your home. All these ways we go after something in life we consider to be beautiful, glorious, until we are in some sense one with it.

Our team was having a team meeting and just talking about the sites we should visit and see while we're here. And at one point, one of our team members, Ross, he pulled up his phone and he showed us a photo image of Arthur's seat.

And he said, guys, I need, need, to enter this.

He even went as far as to say, I need, pointing at Arthur's seat, I need to be one with whatever this is. And I said, Ross, calm down.

[8 : 05] We're going to go there. We'll visit. Don't worry. As in, he didn't just want to see a photo of it. He didn't want to hear someone else talking about their experience of it.

He wanted to enter into it. He wanted to be one with it. And that's the meaning of going after something. Go after you means you're not satisfied until you're one with it somehow.

A similar word the Bible uses for that, I think, is the word communion. Just think about what that word sounds like. The word common and the word union put together. It's to have something in common through union.

That's why Paul, when he describes the sacrament of communion in 1 Corinthians, he describes it not as a mere observance of Christ, but as a participation in Christ.

It's our receiving of Christ into ourselves, being united to him spiritually. But do you know where we first see this communion in the Bible?

[9 : 14] It's in Genesis, in the Trinity. The triune God who created all things and said, let us make mankind in our own image. We see God being communal from all eternity, perfectly satisfied in their union with each other, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, in their beauty, perfection, and glory.

And in creating, in creation, God was extending that joy, that communal joy, to the creatures who are made in his image so that they would join in that fellowship and have communion with God as well.

And because we're made in that image, in the image of this triune God, that's why we cannot help but long for communion with a beauty and glory that is perfectly satisfying.

We will not stop going after things until we find this beautiful and glorious thing. It's how we're made. It's how we're wired.

Now, Jesus' point is, of course, come after me, right? Because I'm here to restore to you this communion with God that was once lost because of sin's wages.

[10:33] But here's the thing I hope you also understand. That is, even if you don't, okay, even if you don't go after Jesus and have communion with him, because you were made in his image, you will have communion with something.

You will chase after and latch on to something you consider to be glorious, beautiful, ultimately, and you will end up uniting yourself to it. You'll be disciplined into it, even if you're not being disciplined into Christ.

It's how you're made. It's how you're wired. You can't help it. So the question, the bigger question, is not whether you're a disciple. You are. The real question is, what are you disciplined by?

What are you uniting yourself to? We're all doing it. The only question is, what is it? What do you identify yourself with most closely?

Whose jersey are you wearing? Which picture do you want to enter into and be one with? We must. What is it? The trouble we fall into as a result of our human fallenness, our sinful nature, is that we latch onto things that are never completely satisfying.

[11:55] Never permanent enough, never true enough, never secure enough, never loving us enough, therefore never satisfying enough. And it's not satisfying enough because we were not made for these things.

We were made for God as Augustine put it. Until we are finding our rest in him, our hearts will be restless because he made us for himself.

That's why Jesus says, come after me. Don't just hear about me, learn about me, listen to teachings about me. Come after me until you're one with me, until you're entered into me, I've entered into you, until we have communion, come after me.

He even says, eat me and drink me and be fully satisfied. This is Jesus' call to discipleship, to go after him and to be satisfied in him ultimately.

And I think this is something we have to as saints and believers understand. To be a Christian does not mean we see Jesus for who he is. But to be a Christian means we go after Jesus because we see him for who he is.

[13:26] Until we're one with him, until we're bathed in him, he's that beautiful and glorious and worthwhile. Have you gone after him this way?

Are you going after him this way as if you must be absolutely identified with him until his beauty, his glory, his life, his character, all that reflects him is reflected in your life, reflected in your character too.

So the first thing this phrase tells, come after me, tells us is this is what you're wired to do, everyone is doing it, the only question is what are you going after?

And the other thing this tells us is you must go after Christ if you want to be satisfied. Only through Christ will you restore your fellowship and communion with your maker, with the triune God and he will, he will satisfy you.

The next thing he reveals to his followers is this, as soon as you take that first step to go after him, as you put your left foot forward to go after him, here's what your right foot does immediately as a follow through, you deny yourself.

[14:45] The call to discipleship is a call to deny yourself, that's the second point. And I think it's interesting that Jesus says, let him, let him deny himself, as if he'll do this willingly and voluntarily, let him, allow him, no need to coerce him, drag him to church against his will, let him gladly, freely, willingly do this, do what?

Deny himself. And you have to ask at this point, why would anybody do that? Why would anybody willingly, voluntarily deny themselves and follow someone else?

I mean, don't we all want to affirm ourselves? Nobody wants to be challenged and denied and corrected and rebuked. I want to be champion, I want to be heard, I want to be approved.

It seems counterintuitive, let him deny himself. Right? It's counterintuitive until, until you realize it's not so counterintuitive if, if you have found something in your life that you actually want to affirm more than you affirm yourself.

And that's possible if and only if you found something in your life that you consider to be more valuable to you than you. Then it becomes a natural movement in your heart to say, hey you, talking to yourself, hey you, move over.

[16:21] I want this in. I want to make room for this. I want to let this beautiful and glorious thing into my life and let it take control. Why? It's just more beautiful and glorious than myself.

I want to let it happen. I want to deny myself so I can affirm this. When we find something more lovely than our own selves, self-denial becomes natural.

Yielding to it becomes natural. For the sake of that thing we'll turn to even our own thoughts and say, hey, hey thoughts, move over. For the thoughts of my beloved, for the knowledge of my beloved, the will of my beloved, the desires of my beloved, the one I value and love more than I value and love myself.

if you think about it, I mean, do you not do this even in your horizontal relationships with one another?

Do we not do this for our friends, spouse, children, neighbors? And it's when you do that, that's when you really realize, okay, I'm doing this.

[17 : 38] I'm actually caring about and valuing the people around me because I'm telling myself to move aside and give them room, affirm them and deny myself.

I'm trying to show them that I do love them, and at times I do love them more than I love myself.

And again, I want to reiterate here what I reiterated earlier, and that is you do this whether you do this with God or not.

Whatever you consider to be most beautiful, glorious, valuable, worthwhile in your life, you will deny yourself to let it in. And question again is not whether you do this, but what you do this with.

For example, if you find your work identity, your career path, career identity, to be the most beautiful, glorious thing in your life worth boasting about, you will deny yourself to get it.

You will deny your health, your diet, you will deny your sleep, you will deny social interactions to go after that.

[18 : 58] That will be a natural movement for you if you consider your work identity to be the most beautiful and glorious thing in your life. if you consider having certain pleasures to be the most beautiful and glorious thing in life, the most valuable thing in life, then you will deny yourself a measure of your character, your self-control, your patience, maybe even your goodness and your purity to go after it.

You're wired to go after what you believe will bring beauty and glory into your life, and you'll deny yourself to do it. The only question is, what is it?

The thing about going after Jesus is this, as you go after him and deny yourself for his sake, it will never ruin you. Latching onto him, indulging in him, if I may say that, it will never ruin you.

If you latch onto anything else, you'll self-destruct. latch onto Christ, you'll come alive. And, scripture says, you will be glorified, as he is.

Have you found this to be alive at the core of your discipleship, your going after Jesus, that for his sake you find all other things to be worth denying?

[20 : 27] have you found him to be more valuable and worth affirming than your self-affirmation? Is he more beautiful and glorious, truer, more freeing, more life-giving than anything else?

Have you found Jesus to be that? Jesus is presuming, right, if you're going to come after me, you see me that way because you will deny yourself as you come after me.

You will. You will say to yourself, move over, self. I want Jesus and his beauty and his glory, his truth, his wisdom, his character, his love in my life more than I want you, self.

Move over thoughts so I can meditate on his words more than I meditate on what you have to say. You can at times even say to your anxieties, move over anxieties, I've listened to you long enough, let me tune into his words of reassurance, his words of control, his words of love.

And you will do this willingly and voluntarily because you love him. So let him deny himself. As in this is what a disciple does willingly and voluntarily.

[21 : 57] When you find Jesus to be the most beautiful, most glorious thing in your life, you will make room for him. Like we sing in that carol, let every heart prepare him room. Why?

He's bringing us joy and blessings far as the curse is found. Lastly, the call to discipleship is a call to daily carry.

Jesus says, and take up his cross daily and follow me. And I just want to hone in on the word daily for a moment. What's the implication of that word daily?

Every day? It implies without ceasing, continuously, as in for the rest of your life. every morning you wake up.

That's daily. What's he saying? He's saying, once you find me, and you begin to come after me, and you're denying yourself as you do it, you find that's, this is it.

[23 : 01] Your daily agenda, your daily mission, your daily calling in life. This is the reason you get out of bed. This is what you prescribe daily for your body and soul to come after me and get more of me.

Because, he says, carry your cross and follow me, which is another way of saying, imitate me and become more and more like me, your cross-carrying savior.

As I carry the ultimate cross for you, he's saying you must carry your little cross and follow me.

Imitate me. Grow in your likeness to me daily. That's your mission now.

That is your primary objective in life. That's your ultimate career. It's your ultimate vocation. Your Christ-likeness. And this is why you should get out of bed every morning.

To do this another day and do it better than yesterday. To be more like Jesus. Of course, we get out of bed to get to work and I get out of bed to also get my kids to school.

[24 : 15] Hopefully on time. Doesn't always happen. To meet our friends on time. To make our appointments. That's what. The question is why.

Why do any of this? What's the ultimate end to it all? And of course, our catechism tells us it's to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. That is the chief end of our existence.

And that's wonderful. How's. What does that look like in all these different spheres of life? Scripture tells us through all these arenas of life becoming for you your school of Christ-likeness.

To love your neighbors as Christ as first loved you. Becoming more and more like Jesus in those very arenas. And making that your daily mission. That's why you got sent into those places to begin with.

To display Christ in you. Your hope of glory. To be a disciple daily means that your ultimate calling, your ultimate identity, your ultimate vocation is this.

[25 : 27] You have become one with Christ and you are daily becoming more and more like him. This is the the dailiness of Christian discipleship or the Christian life.

The radical ordinary nature of Christian discipleship. And when we deviate from this path and fall into sin we return and that is our daily repentance.

The trouble I think comes to us believers when we complicate this very simple faith and start treating Christianity more like this sort of special program to improve our lives just a little bit.

Or like a fitness program to sort of enrich our lives when we feel kind of weak and suffering through trials. Or some self-help program to better certain aspects of our lives.

Like you can go to the Barnes and Noble section and just find whether it's a finance section or a health section and you flip open the Bible for a section that might help you. And Jesus, that is not his call.

[26 : 39] He's not talking about that at all. He's not saying take me as a sort of useful tool to improve your life. He's saying I am your life. He's not saying let me show you a better way.

He's saying I am the way. I'm it. I am the life. Don't live anything else. Live me is what he's saying. Come after me daily.

Rest of your life. Now that you are in me, I am in you. Put more and more of me on display through all that I've given you.

Your relationships, your situations, even your trials and your sufferings. That's his call to discipleship. And to kind of sum it all up in an image, Jesus says this pathway of daily becoming more like Christ, imitating his character, his love and putting it on display.

It looks like this. You carrying your cross. And that to me, before it sounds difficult, it does sound difficult.

[27 : 47] It should. Before it sounds difficult, it tells me Jesus is a realist. Jesus is not naive. The world might be.

Jesus is not. The world might think, yeah, you just got to love on people. All you need is love. And love is love. Love is an intuition.

It's a passion. It's a feeling. It's an instinct. You don't need an ancient religion to tell you how to love or what love is. You just got to love. We all have it in us. To me, and with all due respect to those who believe that, and maybe some of you believe that, I think that's just quite naive.

Because we cannot love, at least not truly, and we don't know love, I don't think, until we know how to put ourselves to death somehow. Until we somehow carry a cross of self-denial as we approach our neighbors.

Until we do that, I think what we call love is just self-love, and it's not self-giving. It's a love that only takes. It's not sacrificial. It's a love that demands.

[29 : 00] And that's not true love. Jesus is being very real with us when he says, here's what you imitating my love and putting that on display looks like.

It looks like you struggling in carrying your cross. Just as I did. If you want true love, not the selfish, self-asserting kind, but the self-giving, sacrificial, right, the truly noble and virtuous kind, if you're sure that's what you want, know this, this is what it's going to look like.

You carrying your cross as I carried your ultimate cross for you. Your sin is upon my shoulders. Your sin is nailing me there until it is accomplished.

My dying breath bringing you life, letting you know that it is finished as we sing in our hymn. If you want to know true love this way, this kind of love, you have to look to my cross that was for you and learn from that and do that for others.

And that's why I say this idea that anybody can love anybody. Love is love. It's just a passion and an intuition and an instinct. I think it's quite naive. I want to just take, for example, a scenario where, imagine, you had a long day at work or in class.

[30 : 21] You're back home. You're ready to unwind and de-stress. So you have your favorite TV show ready to play and you also have your favorite bucket of ice cream ready to go.

Right? So whether that's your favorite Korean drama, which I'm sure you're crazy fans of, or Ben and Jerry's ice cream, whatever it is, you're good to go, ready to relax.

And then the phone rings. It's your friend. They had the worst day. And they want to tell you all about it.

What is love in that moment? Love would be turning off the TV, putting the lid back on the ice cream, putting it back in the freezer, picking up, saying to your friend, go ahead.

Tell me all about it. I'm here to listen. Which is your doing what? Putting your evening of relaxation to death. Putting your unwinding to death for the next hour or two or three.

[31 : 42] I don't know what your friends are like. As long as they want to talk to you. Yeah, I'm here. I'm here for you. I'm listening. Tell me what's going on.

Or let's say you're having an argument with your spouse. I'm sure it doesn't happen very often in Scotland. Happens quite a bit in Atlanta, Georgia.

I counsel quite a few couples who run into this. You're having an argument with your spouse, and it's this classic back and forth between what you view as the right thing and what your spouse thinks is the right thing.

It's a conflict. It's escalating. What does it mean to love your spouse in that moment? I'm tired.

Let's stop talking about this. Let's go to bed. That's not love. That's not making that's a ceasefire. But the war is technically still going on.

[32 : 41] That's like North Korea and South Korea right now, by the way. It's a ceasefire. They're not at peace. Here's one thing love could do in that moment. Regardless of what the other person's speck in their eye is, you acknowledging the log in your own eye, you owning that first, and you confessing it first.

Honey, regardless of what you did, I should not have spoken to you that way. That was sinful, the way I spoke to you.

Please forgive me. Owning your sin while not saying anything about the other person's sin. What are you doing there? You're putting your ego to death.

You're killing your pride. You're crucifying your self-righteousness and your defensiveness. And that's love. This is why true love isn't just a natural thing that just bubbles up and wells up in it.

Or love isn't just an instinct. It's just, that's not just a passion. It's cross-carrying. And this is how we love like Christ, and this is Christian discipleship.

[33 : 58] Our carrying our cross daily in the very spheres of life that God has called us into daily and to carry our cross there. Take up your cross daily and follow me.

The only way any of us will even begin to consider practicing this is if you really consider yourself to be a true recipient of this.

This beautiful self-giving love of Jesus. If you've received it, then you probably know what it means to give it. That's when you'll say, I want to be one with a lover of my soul and I want to imitate him and put him on display in my life.

I'm okay with denying my ego, denying my pride and denying my comfort and letting him show. Because he is the one I value the most.

He is the most beautiful and glorious thing I've ever encountered. This cross-carrying power of Christ. His love. His love is my Arthur's seat that I must enter into and be one with.

[35 : 11] It's the only way we'll know how to do this. It's if you really have received this yourself. What does Jesus say of the woman crying at his feet?

Mercy. She loves much because she knows she's forgiven much. Are you forgiven much? I heard my seminary professor say it very simply and it still hits me.

If you think you're a little sinner, tiny little sinner, you have a tiny little savior. If you think you're a great big sinner, then you believe in a great and big savior.

Have you received this great mercy of God for your great sins? grace, then out of that, out of that gratitude, out of that rejoicing, out of that thankfulness and your love for him, you'll extend that mercy to those around you.

It's all because for you, Jesus is not useful, he's beautiful. His love for you, his grace for you, his mercy, his kindness towards you, is beautiful and it's captivated you.

[36 : 27] you want nothing more than you putting him therefore on display and that's God's call for our discipleship. May the Lord help us in this.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do ask for you