

# Discipleship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back to God's Word and to Luke chapter 9, and let me just read from verse 23 again.

He said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? When I was growing up, I had a very compartmentalized life.

For example, I would go to school and I would be there at least somewhat attentive. But you can bet as soon as the bell went, 3.30pm, I was out the door, I was on the bus, and school was not in my thoughts.

Learning was not in my thoughts. I was done for the day, and that was it. I was on to the next thing, and they just would not meet in my mind until the next morning.

[ 1 : 06 ] And I suppose when it came to church life, I was brought up in church, it was the same. I would go to church, I would be there an hour on Sunday morning, an hour on Sunday night, and then the rest of the week, it wasn't so much of a factor, except perhaps the encouragement to read the Bible and so on.

And then I might go to camp in the summer, and then when that was done, that was it. Very compartmentalized, very neat. I knew where each thing went.

And I think all of us probably do this to a certain extent, perhaps with our faith, perhaps in our jobs. We let work problems, for example, stay at work and not come home even.

Got that the wrong way around. When we do our hobbies and so on, we maybe move on to something completely different, and we don't have time to think about it. And maybe that's a good thing for these things, not letting one thing affect the other.

But what we're thinking about tonight is being a disciple of Jesus, someone who comes after Jesus, someone who follows him. And that doesn't leave room for compartmentalization.

[ 2 : 13 ] When Jesus calls people to follow him, he doesn't ask for us only on Sundays, and just for an hour, and maybe on one night a week when we go to a prayer meeting.

He asks for our whole lives, as I hope we'll see tonight, as if it wasn't obvious from what we read. Because to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus, it really does take all of us. It takes over everything. It pervades everything. In fact, I remember, I don't know if it was a book or a sermon, but a Tim Keller story saying he was talking to a woman who didn't want to be a Christian because she realized it would take over her whole life.

And that scared her. There was no compartment she knew. She understood, this is going to be everything. Everything I do. And that's what it is. I mentioned last week in Hope Community Church Helmsborough, we've been looking at our values as a church.

And we were looking at being word-centered last week, which you heard in the evening. Two weeks before that, we were looking at being Christ-centered. Well, now we almost bring these two things together.

[ 3 : 25 ] And I want to share this with you as well, because what we're talking about is following Jesus. Discipleship, that's the title of the sermon. I'm not very creative with titles, but that's what it is. It does what it says on the tin.

Maybe sometimes we think about discipleship in terms of programs. Do discipleship explored. Do the Bible study. All these things. Have a one-to-one with someone.

Have a mentor. These things are great. Don't misunderstand me. But we need a foundation. And fundamentally, what being a disciple is, what discipleship is, is being a follower of Jesus.

And growing in that as believers, bearing fruit. And that is essential to us as individuals and as a whole church. So tonight, I want us to see this foundation.

And if we understand this foundation of following Jesus, as we're going to see it's denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, it makes everything else that we do, partly with the goal of following Jesus, but everything else that we do anyway, our work, our families, and so on, so much more worthwhile.

[ 4 : 32 ] And it makes us stronger as Christians, if we understand this, and stronger as a church, we pray. We are saved by grace. So let's be clear on that from the start.

And we're going to see more of it. God gives us our salvation, our redemption, our forgiveness from sins, absolutely free. But it's something we absolutely need.

And it's in that which we stand. And yet, a guy called Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis, willing to pay the price for following Jesus, this.

He famously called grace that doesn't come with radical discipleship as cheap grace. You know, that idea where you're saved one day, and then it doesn't affect your life.

That's cheap grace. Where you're just forgiven so you can live how you want. That's cheap grace. I think he's right, because Jesus makes it very clear in this passage that following him is something that is our whole lives.

[ 5 : 32 ] It is not the optional extra. It's not just the add-on for the super Christians. This is our whole life. When we place our faith in him, we are following him in everything.

I want us to see two simple things tonight. First of all, the cost of discipleship. And second of all, the prize of discipleship. And then if there's time, we may have a few more practical points.

But first of all, the cost of discipleship. There is a cost to be paid when it comes to following Jesus.

Yes, we are saved freely by grace.

Don't misunderstand me. And yet there is a cost that is everything, including our very lives. We know what it is to count the cost of something, to be ready to dedicate our lives to it.

You know, think if you've got a mortgage, you're kind of, I think the word mortgage kind of means death bond or something like that. You're stuck in it for life, aren't you? You've got to keep paying it.

[ 6 : 33 ] And it becomes sort of your life. If you want a house, we're locked into it. And sacrifices might be needed to be made for that. But there's something far greater.

That's just a shadow of what it is to follow Jesus. We are giving everything. What he's calling us to is a life of sacrifice, a life of self-denial. And when we think of self-denial, we might think of something, well, Lent's on at the moment, isn't it?

People in some churches anyway do Lent. And they give up something for 40 days. You know, I'm giving up chocolate or I'm giving up junk food, McDonald's or whatever else.

They do that. And we might think of it in terms of that lifestyle change. You know, self-denial. I'm going to deny myself this specific thing. My lifestyle is going to change.

And I'm going to be a better Christian. I'm going to be a better person. And we all kind of think in that way. But this kind of self-improvement thinking can affect our Christian lives.

[ 7 : 32 ] What we do when we do that is we turn our faith into a kind of legalism where really what we're doing is we're trying to take control of individual aspects of our life, of our faith.

We think I'll be a good Christian if I can simply change my behavior by sheer willpower. And of course, it's a good desire. We want to change our behaviors.

We want to be more like Christ. But when we base it on what we do and we just do one thing, the fundamental issue is still the same. We're living for ourselves and we're living in self for ourselves. We're living thinking that we're in control because that's the reality of our hearts. We want to be in control. We want to be the boss. We want to be number one. And the idea of God being in control, the idea of God being more important than us, even those of us who are Christians, we can find that hard to really live it out.

It's difficult. But we don't so much have a behavioral problem. I'm sure we've got many of them. But really the fundamental problem with all of us is our faith because what we're so prone to doing is putting our faith in ourselves, in our own goodness and our own works.

[ 8 : 43 ] But the self-denial that Jesus calls us to, to being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, is the complete surrender of our whole lives to Jesus.

That is self-denial. It's denial of the self of self-control. We deny that we know what is best. We deny that we are lords of our own lives. We reject the thinking of that poem, *Invictus*, that says, I am the

master of my fate.

I am the captain of my soul. And instead we look to Jesus and we follow him. And we see him as the captain of our salvation, the one who we follow all the way.

And this is what Jesus' disciples do. In fact, his 12 disciples, the very first ones, what did they do? They followed him and they denied themselves.

Back in Luke 5, there's Matthew. And he went on to write a gospel, of course. But he was a tax collector. And Jesus finds him sitting at his booth. And being a tax collector was a lucrative career. [ 9 : 44 ] You could take a little money on the side. You were paid well anyway. And, well, he was sitting in a booth. It doesn't sound like the worst job, does it? Make lots of money for sitting, taking money from other people.

None of, all of us would probably quite like that. It was an easier life. But Jesus comes and says, follow me. And what does Matthew do? He gets up, he leaves the booth behind. I don't think he even says anything to anyone.

He just goes and he follows Jesus. It's self-denial. He's saying, my life doesn't matter. I'm going to follow this Jesus. He's so worth following that I will go wherever he goes.

Now, we know for the disciples, they didn't always find it easy to do that. And yet they had that drive to go and to follow Jesus. It was the same for Peter and Andrew.

They were fishermen. And as soon as Jesus calls them to follow, well, Mark's gospel tells them, they immediately got up and went. Again, there was no tying up the boat. There was no putting the mast down.

[ 10 : 41 ] And it was just go, go, I'm going to follow Jesus. And then James and John as well, right after they do the exact same thing. They needed to fish to eat, to pay the bills.

Yet they follow Jesus. It's self-denial. It's saying Jesus is so much more worth following than anything else in this world. They would rather cast their lot with Jesus, put in their whole lives with him, than be in control, than just go through the motions of life.

And that's so challenging, isn't it? Because what do we do? Look at our society. We live in a world where there is plenty, at least in our country.

We live in a world where it's so easy, for many of us anyway, to work, to make a lot of money, or to make enough money anyway, to keep going, and to kind of just push Jesus to the side.

And so we need to have that attitude. We need to challenge ourselves. Are we ready to leave our whole lives behind? Are we ready to give up all the material possessions that we have simply to follow Jesus?

[ 11 : 47 ] Now, I'm not saying we should all go out of here, sell our houses, give up the car. Of course not. And yet, it is that attitude, it is that heart that says, these things are not what makes my life worth living.

These things, good gifts as they are, are not as important to me as following Jesus and being one of his people. That is what matters to the disciple, to the one who follows him.

It's being with Jesus. And it really is our whole lives. Jesus describes it as taking up our cross daily. I'm sure most of us in here, hopefully, have heard about the cross.

We know a cross means death, a painful, horrific, shameful death. And yet, Jesus is saying, take up your cross daily. He's saying, if you're going to follow me, it's not going to always be easy.

It's not going to be without suffering. It's not going to be without pain. It's going to have all these things. Jesus is honest about these things. And sure enough, you know, well, Jesus himself had it, as we'll see, but the disciples had it.

[ 12 : 56 ] They went out. And we see that they struggled, they failed at many times, and yet they keep taking up their cross daily. Jesus calls us to say, this world does not matter.

He calls us to even be dead to this world, to be ready to take its attacks, to take its shame, to take its mocking, its beating. We know that Christians throughout the world do face death for their faith. They are martyred, as these disciples, many of them would be. We may not have that in our country, but we know that as much as we say, sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will never harm me.

Words do hurt us, and we do feel their pain. And they actually hurt more sometimes, because there's no just quick cure for them. We can't put them in a cast. We're harmed by what others say. And taking up our cross is being ready to face the rejection of this world, all its slings and arrows following Jesus. It doesn't mean we'll always face hate or opposition, but it does mean that we'll

never be quite in line with the values of this world, with the beliefs of most people in this world. [14:03] And that's actually a very difficult thing, because the world seems so big and so strong. The world seems so convincing and plausible. And yet when we follow Jesus, we're going in a different direction.

And that's partly why I think he says, take up your cross daily, because we'll be tempted to follow the world. We'll be tempted to go the wrong way. We wake up every morning, and we want to live for ourselves.

We aren't how we should be when we wake up every morning, and not just because if you're like me, you feel very sluggish and slow in the morning, and have slept through your alarm as I did this morning.

It's more, it's much darker than that, because we wake up and we think, how am I going to succeed today? How am I going to do things my way? We might not say it like that, but that's really what we wake up and think.

It's like we have amnesia when we come to following Jesus. Every day is another day, though, that we need to follow him, to say no to ourselves, to say no to our own success.

[15:08] Our main goal is every day, isn't to advance ourselves. It's not to advance our career, or to make the most money, or whatever else gets in the way of following Jesus.

Our goal is to be wholeheartedly committed to him, and following him, even if it means suffering, even if it means pain, even if it's difficult.

All of us have things that get in the way of that. And if someone says they don't, I think they're probably a liar. I couldn't speak for everyone, but I know if you hear me saying that, I'm lying. We have things that get in the way. And so practically, this means we need to be dedicated in our lives to identifying the things that we subconsciously, or even consciously, value more than Jesus. We need to kill them, to put them to death, to take up our cross, to put our own desires, to put ourselves to, our own desires to death, for the sake of following Jesus.

[16:06] Nothing is more important. This is our lives. That is what Jesus is saying. Deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. There can be no room for other things in our hearts.

They must be captured by a love for Jesus, by Jesus himself, and all his beauty and his glory, as we see him going ahead of us, because he does go ahead of us.

This may sound like a very difficult thing, what I'm saying. Deny ourselves? Put to death all these things? Really? That's what Jesus wants me to do? Why should we follow him if that's what he wants us to do?

Well, Jesus himself doesn't ask us to go where he hasn't already been. In verse 22, he tells his disciples how he'll die. He says, 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. Jesus himself will suffer this. He will take up his cross. And it's then that he says, come after me.

[17:14] You're going to be taking up your cross daily. You must do this. And so, more than just the example that we have, the picture that we have is of Jesus himself going to the cross, as we see later in the gospel, giving his life for us, dying in our place.

That is where we follow. We're not following so that we can say, I'm really good at following. I've suffered more than anyone else. I've taken up my cross more days than you have. It's nothing like that.

It's seeing what's already been done by Jesus and following him. And we're following him, not because we're trying to make ourselves worthy of Jesus, not because we think that's a great example and I'm just going to do the exact same and that will make me a good person.

We're following him because he has died, because he has gone there and he has done it. And we're thankful, we're rejoicing knowing what Jesus has done.

And that the life we live is not for ourselves and that we really can deny ourselves and live for him. And that we are following him where he has been, yes, but we're following him beyond that because what did we read?

[18:28] And on the third day, be raised. That's what we remember every Sunday. That's what we'll remember, especially at Easter. On the third day, be raised. He has already died. We die to self, but we look forward.

And the only thing that can really motivate us in all this is that Jesus has done it. He has gone ahead. And when we follow him, we are not doing it on our own strength. We are not doing anything that he has not done.

We are remembering that he is with us. Nothing else will motivate us. If I stood up here and said, well, you've just got to follow more. You've just got to do this more and more. None of us would do it.

We'd just feel ashamed and guilt. And yet, when we see what Jesus has done, when we see that he has gone ahead, that is the real motivation. We live in light of what he has done.

And that is what can drive us forward, knowing that he has given us his spirit as well, knowing that we are not alone and he will be with us because he has gone ahead.

[ 19 : 29 ] And there will be a prize for us. That brings us to our second point. This is not pointless. There is a prize for discipleship. Everyone loves a prize. And there is a great one here.

Jesus says, whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

Taking up our cross is, perhaps paradoxically, the way to life. And yet again, that's exactly how Jesus did it, isn't it? He took up his cross and that was the way to defeating death, to rising from the dead.

When we think about what we live for, maybe just ask yourself the question, what do I live for? What makes life worth living for me? Why do I get up in the morning? For many, it will be money. For many, it will be work. For many, it will be family and so on. What is more important to us than Christ? According to one article, one of the biggest regrets of those on their deathbed is that they've spent too much time in the office, that they've worked too hard and they've not had time for their family or missing, and they've missed the kids growing up, birthday parties and all these things.

[ 20 : 43 ] And it's frightening, really, when we stop and think about it. It's a bit like what Jesus is saying. Whoever would save his life will lose it.

Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. If we're living for things that are not Jesus, if these are things that are more important than him, then we're wasting our lives.

Imagine for a second, it's not nice to think about, getting to our deathbed and looking back and thinking, I wasted my time.

I regret the time I spent doing this or that or whatever it may be. It's frightening. It really is. And many millions each year go through that.

What have we spent our lives on? Well, what Jesus promises gives us hope of a greater prize, of something that is worth living for. Whoever loses their life, who does what we've just talked about, takes up their cross daily, denies themselves, will save their life.

[ 21 : 43 ] You know, he's not promising an easy life, but he is promising eternal life. This life and all that it offers is worth nothing when compared to what's in store for God's people.

The world will tell us, do this and you'll be happy. Do this and you'll be successful. Make yourself a legacy. Make sure people remember your name. Give yourself your best life.

Live your best life. And they promise so much and deliver so little. And what Jesus tells us is that if you try and save your life in that way, you'll lose it. It'll be gone.

You get to the end of your life and that's it. Nothing more. The end. In fact, what he says is he'll be ashamed when he comes in his glory.

That there's consequences. That there is something that will be against us. That he will be against us. That is, again, frightening. We must live for him.

[ 22 : 38 ] The things we have here have their place, some more than others. But if we're living for them, if they're what's more important, then we've got something wrong. A lot of you have heard before the missionary Jim Elliot, who put it best when he says, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

He, of course, would famously lose his life for the sake of following Jesus and going to an unreached tribe and sharing the gospel. They would kill him for it.

And yet his wife then famously went on and they were converted and became followers themselves. But Jim Elliot knew that following Jesus was far more important because he was gaining what he could not lose and that was his life.

He knew that if he lived for things in this world, that he would lose them and he would lose them forever. And yet if he was to follow Jesus, he would gain something and he would keep it forever.

He would gain eternal life.

That is what Jesus promises us here. He promises us life. It does not profit us if we gain the whole world. We could be as successful as anyone has ever been in this world.

[ 23 : 52 ] And yet when it comes to the end, it will be worth nothing. Absolutely nothing. We will all be the exact same. And let's face it, no offense, but pretty much all of us in here probably aren't going to be the most successful person in life.

We're all pretty normal, I think. And if that's really what we've lived for, that's even sadder, isn't it? You know, it's what is most important to us.

Jesus promises us so much more. He promises us eternal life. He promises a place actually where there is no tears, there is no suffering, there is no pain, there is no death, there is no sadness, a place of perfect happiness and justice.

That is life. He promises us heaven. He promises us the new earth. In fact, he promises even, you know, sometimes maybe we're guilty of thinking of heaven as a bit like floating on the clouds, little spirits going about.

But no, we will physically be resurrected as he was from the dead as verse 22 points to, third day be raised. And we will share in that. We physically will be raised from the dead.

[ 25 : 01 ] We will not be disembodied spirits floating around. We will be people and we will live forever and we will be with him and that will be glorious and wonderful and happy and we will, there will be no sadness, there will be no war, there will just be light, there will be Christ and we will see him face to face.

We will have followed him through taking up our cross daily, followed him to eternal life. That is the prize, that is what he offers us. He tells us to lay up treasures in heaven and that is the treasure, it is eternal life.

Discipleship may bear a cost, but the prize is so much greater, so much more worthwhile, something that does not fade, that is imperishable, incorruptible, undefiled.

That is what he promises us and that is what we all receive, what we're guaranteed when we place our faith in him. That's what it is to be a disciple, that's what we get.

We look forward to these things, we have them, we hold on to them and we will all receive them when we've placed our faith in him. This is the foundation of discipleship, that we follow him no matter the cost and we follow him all the way to him.

[ 26 : 14 ] We call it discipleship, this is the Christian life, this is every Christian. You know, let's maybe think of some more practical things, what it means for us as Christians, as a church.

Well, it's essential, isn't it? It's not easy believism or cheap grace, whatever you want to call it. Being a Christian is following Jesus. We don't just believe and then live a completely unchanged life.

We don't just have some emotional experience. Faith is trusting in Jesus and trusting him even when there's difficult times ahead, even when we're going through them.

Discipleship and growing in our faith is not an optional extra. You know, it's often said and I think it's true that we're justified by faith alone but the faith that justifies is never alone. There is fruit from our faith.

It is not what saves us. Let's always be clear on that. But there is always fruit from our faith. And so, this is essential. And Jesus, when he told his disciples to go into the world, he didn't say, go and make some converts and then move on quickly.

[ 27 : 19 ] He said, go and make disciples. People who will follow him taking up their cross daily. And second, this is central. We are always Christ-centered churches.

We're word-centered churches. And this is central. The cross is central to our faith. And what Jesus tells us is take up your cross daily. This is a central, central thing. It's essential, yes, but it's not in the background.

It doesn't just go on in the background. It's central to our lives. It's something that we shape our lives around. And it's worth doing, third of all. Well, Jesus has already died.

He's already done it, as we said. He's gone before us. He's risen from the dead. And what that means is that our future is guaranteed. We will not get to the end of our lives and find ourselves having wasted them.

We may not have a very successful life. We may not have a very good life. We may have a life filled with suffering. And yet, we will get to the end and we will find treasure in heaven.

[ 28 : 21 ] This is worth doing. This is a cost worth paying, a price worth paying. We will have known our saviour more and lived for him more and we will be with him and we will have all the eternal life, all the riches of heaven that he offers.

And in fact, more than that, it makes the life that we live here more worthwhile. This is the central part of our lives and it makes our life worthwhile. Everything else is shaped by it, subservient to it. We're Christ-like in everything and we're equipped for every part of our lives. Maybe you hear some of this and think, well, it doesn't matter what job I do. It doesn't matter how I raise my kids or whatever it might be.

But no, actually, when we're following Jesus, when we're not living for ourselves, it makes these things more worthwhile. We're not doing these things for ourselves.

We're doing them as disciples. We're doing them in a Christ-like way. They're more worthwhile. They have more meaning, more value than they ever had before. Finally, we need to listen to the words.

[ 29 : 24 ] We saw last week how the Bible directs us, how the Bible points us to Jesus, how the Bible is profitable for our training and so on. And I know the Bible isn't mentioned in this passage, but that's what we saw last week and of course it applies to following Jesus.

It's the Bible that we saw that makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. And if we're not having the Bible at the centre of our lives, we're not going to be able to follow Jesus.

And that's why we do Bible studies and we have sermons and so on and we're involved in these things because that's where we are able to feed on God's word and be able to know how to follow him.

And these are just four things practically we can think about, reflect on and even do. But fundamentally what we need to see is what we've said that following Jesus isn't a part of our lives, it is our lives when we've placed our faith in him.

This is who we are. We're followers of Jesus who deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him and know that we have a prize already won for us through Jesus' death and that we will follow him all the way to eternal life.

[ 30 : 37 ] Nothing else in this world matches up. All these things are what make us forfeit our lives. We will save our lives when we follow Jesus, when we reject what this world tries to teach us, when we reject ourselves and our own self-control.

We reject these things and follow him. We receive forgiveness and we receive eternal life. To be a disciple is to be a wonderful thing.

It is the good way, it is the best way. Maybe not the easy way and yet is the way of guaranteed success and guaranteed life. May God bless these thoughts to us.

Let's pray to him. Heavenly Father, we long to be wholehearted disciples. Forgive us when we get distracted.

Forgive us when we forget about where Jesus has already been, when we forget the gospel, when we forget that we stand in your grace and what Christ has done.

[ 31 : 37 ] And Lord, let the thought of the gospel motivate us, drive us to follow Christ knowing that because he has died we are guaranteed it all. That we have so much to be thankful for, so much stored up for us.

And that no matter what we face in this life, no matter our sorrows, that Christ has faced greater sorrows and he will bring us to be with you in a place of no tears or pain or suffering.

That we have been cleansed, made new and that we have new hearts. That we have Christ's righteousness and that we will be with you forever. Lord, help us to think of heaven.

Help us to think of the new heavens and the new earth. To think that we will be restored, renewed, made perfect and live forever.

Lord, comfort us with these thoughts we pray. We ask it all in the name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 32 : 37 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.