

## **The Pattern of Discipleship**

Luke 9:23-27

The past two weeks we've been making the case from Scripture for being disciples of Jesus. A disciple is an apprentice – someone who is learning from Jesus how to live the life He wants us to live. Unless we are apprenticed to Jesus we cannot live out the mission and calling that Jesus gave us. We have to be disciples if we want to make disciples. We can't bring others to a place of being apprenticed to Jesus if we ourselves aren't apprenticed to Jesus. But if we are disciples of Jesus, progressively becoming like Him in thought, word, and actions, we will live out our calling as the "light of the world."

The question we haven't answered is, "So what do we actually do if we want to be disciples of Jesus?" After all, being a disciple of Jesus has got to be more than a vague spiritual feeling. Being a disciple has to be more than just trying harder. Being apprenticed to Jesus is a pattern and orientation of life. Today we are going to consider a passage of Scripture in which Jesus explains this pattern of life and explicitly tells people what they need to do *if* they "wish to come after [Him]. . ." Jesus describes a basic pattern of discipleship in Luke 9:23-27.

At the end of this message I'm going to ask you to consider trying this pattern of life for the next month. Some of you already live as disciples, but this will be brand new for others of you. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, Jesus invites us to come to Him and learn from Him how to live this life. At the end of the message I'm going to challenge you to consider a pattern of discipleship for the next month in order to "taste and see" that life as a disciple is good.

***The Context of Discipleship. (Luke 9:18-22)*** Let me set the context for this passage. Jesus is alone with the disciples. Jesus asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples give the range of opinions: some think Jesus is John the Baptist, others think He's Elijah, and others that one of the prophets has raised from the dead. But then Jesus asks them the question that He asks each one of us: "But who do *you* say that I am?" Ultimately we have to quit giving others' opinions and say, "This is my conviction about Jesus." Peter answered for the rest and said, "The Christ of God." They believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

Jews in the first-century had some very definite expectations for the Messiah – the "Anointed One" promised in the Old Testament. The most basic expectation was that the Messiah would establish the kingdom of God on this earth. He would establish the kingdom by defeating the enemies of God and by permanently restoring true temple worship. In this way, the kingdom of God would be established on earth and Israel would enjoy a right relationship with God.

Jesus essentially affirmed the accepted vocation/calling of the Messiah. He began His ministry by announcing that "the Kingdom of God is at hand" – through Him, God was on the verge of taking over. But He made it clear that God would establish His kingdom in a radically different way than anybody expected. It would not be by political dominance and by the sword; it would be through the crucifixion of the Messiah. He would not restore true temple worship in Jerusalem; Jesus' body was the temple that would bring God and humanity together. And the fiercest enemy of Israel that needed to be defeated was not the Romans, but sin. A right relationship with God was not only for Israel, but for all the families of the earth.

After Peter says, "We believe you are the Christ of God," we read this in Luke 9:21-22:

21 But He warned them, and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 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 be raised up on the third day."

Jesus accomplished His mission as the Messiah by being rejected, crucified, and raised up on the third day. Through His death and resurrection all the families of the earth would be blessed. We have to keep Jesus' mission as the Messiah firmly in mind when we ask the question, "So what do we actually do if we want to be disciples of Jesus?" A disciple is someone who is apprenticed to a master teacher in order to do what that teacher does. If the teacher is going to the cross, being His disciple/apprentice will also involve a cross. That's the context of discipleship.

Let's look at the pattern of discipleship.

***The Pattern of Discipleship. (Luke 9:23)*** After explaining that His mission as the Messiah would involve going to the cross before being raised up on the third day, Jesus says this about those who wish to "come after" Him:

23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Jesus never tried to hide what it would cost people to follow Him. He never begged people to follow Him. Here Jesus simply says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me. . ." Jesus readily acknowledged that not everybody wants to follow Him. I think it would be good for each of us to pause and consider, "Do I really 'wish to come after' Jesus? Do I really want to live my life apprenticed to Jesus, learning from Him how to live like He lived?"

If you don't really want to follow after Jesus, the pattern of discipleship is going to seem completely unreasonable. Ultimately, if you don't really want to follow Jesus, you will find Jesus' teaching impossible.

Jesus ***first*** tells people who "wish to come after" Him: he must ***deny himself***. The verb "deny" is sometimes translated "disown" or "denounce." To deny is the polar opposite of "to confess" (Leifeld, p. 923). Whereas we are supposed to confess Christ (in the sense of acknowledging Him and identifying with Him) we are supposed to deny/renounce ourselves. This obviously isn't an absolute renunciation everything we are; this isn't a rejection of our personalities and our uniquenesses. Rather, denying ourselves means to denounce everything within us that is at odds with our apprenticeship to Jesus.

Let's say, for example, that you hate somebody. Hatred takes many different forms – some types of hatred are more refined than others. Some people feed their hatred by replaying an offense over and over in their minds. Others express their hatred by sarcasm or insults. Others just find satisfaction when something bad happens to the person they hate. What we don't realize is that our hatreds glob onto our souls and become a part of us. And sometimes we love our hatreds and can't imagine living without them. You can probably think of some people who are defined by what they hate – whether it's people with different political convictions or different theological convictions. Most people feel fully justified in their hatreds; we have good reasons for hating the people we hate.

The issue for those who want to be apprenticed to Jesus is that He says, “You have heard it said that you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . .” (Matthew 5:43-44). You and I don’t have to be apprenticed to Jesus. But *if* we want to come after Him, we are going to have to deny/renounce our hatred. That is not the way of Jesus; that is the way of the world. We will never shine as lights in the world if we are LIKE the world.

Denying ourselves means renouncing our favorite sins and our loyalties that compete with our devotion to God – whether it’s loyalty to money or people or comfort or reputation.

**Second**, Jesus tells people who “wish to come after” Him: he must *take up his cross daily*. In the first century in the Roman Empire, if you “took up your cross” you were about to be crucified. It’s hard for us to appreciate that Jesus is using brutal, shocking imagery here. In our day He might say, “You need to strap yourself into an electric chair.” In the first century if you saw somebody “taking up his cross” he was on “a one-way journey . . . he’d not be back” (Leon Morris, *Luke*, p. 170). The imagery makes clear that if we want to follow Jesus, we need to die to self. We need to die to anything that is at odds with the will of God.

Notice that Jesus said we must take up our cross *daily*. This isn’t a one-time decision. This is a settled way of life. Day by day we will need to consciously die to the things that keep us from following the way of Jesus. At the end of this message I am going to suggest a prayer that we can pray daily that allows us to express our willingness to deny ourselves and take up the cross.

When you think about it, this only makes sense for those who are apprenticed to Jesus. That’s because Jesus said to His Father, “Not My will but Yours be done.” He was willing to take up a cross literally in order to carry out God’s will. If we claim to be apprenticed to Jesus, how can we say, “That was fine and good for Jesus but I’m not going to die to my lust, my anger, my materialism, my worry, my whatever.”

**Third**, Jesus tells people who “wish to come after” Him: *follow Me*. In Jesus’ day, some of His disciples literally followed Him around. But the term was used figuratively of following someone’s teaching or way of life. God said of the children of Israel, for example, that they wouldn’t enter the Promised Land because “they did not follow Me fully” (Num. 32:11). They bowed down and worshipped idols; they grumbled against God and Moses; they wished they were in slavery in Egypt again. Following God fully would have meant accepting that His teaching was good and walking in that truth.

To follow Jesus means to accept His truth and walking in it. To use the terminology of John 15, it means abiding in Christ and letting Christ’s word abide in us. Paul spoke about letting “the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Colossians 3:16) so that His teaching might form the way we think and act. Peter spoke about imitating Jesus’ pattern of suffering – not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead (1 Peter 2-3).

To follow Jesus also means to follow Him in His mission as the Messiah. Think about it this way. It would be strange to be apprenticed to a master mechanic and never actually work on cars. It would be strange to be apprenticed to a master painter and never paint. It would be equally strange to be apprenticed to the Messiah and not be involved in bringing blessing to all

the families of the earth. Following Jesus will involve following Him in being the light of the world and of making disciples of all the nations.

The progression is important here. Unless we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily, there is no way we will follow Christ.

***The Reward of Discipleship. (Luke 9:24-27)*** In verses 24-27 Jesus talks about the reward of discipleship and the consequences of non-discipleship. If you're on the fence, wondering whether you really want to "come after Jesus" and follow Him, listen very carefully to what Jesus says. In verse 24 we have one of Jesus' paradoxical statements that needs to sink down deep into our souls:

24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

Everybody has a life. Unless you were a disciple of Jesus from early in life, you built a life that was largely independent of God. You found ways to survive that worked for you. This doesn't mean that your entire life has been a waste or that you haven't done anything good for others; you might have accomplished a lot and helped many people. But our lives are a mix of both dignity (because we're created in the image of God) and depravity (because we're sinful – born in sin). But unless we were apprenticed to Jesus from a young age, we have built lives largely independent of God. We have habits of thinking and ways of living that make sense to us but that are at odds with the kingdom God is establishing. That is the life we have to decide whether we are going to save or lose.

You "save your life" by clinging to the life you have built independent of God. We save our life by refusing to deny ourselves and take up the cross daily. Jesus says that the person who concludes, "This is who I am . . . I am going to live the way I've always lived," will look back and say, "I lost my whole life; I threw it all away." That is one option.

You "lose your life for Jesus' sake" by denying yourself, taking up your cross daily and following Jesus. In this way you allow Him to restructure the way you think and the way you speak and the way you act. At first it will feel like death. Your life may currently be self-centered or so sensual or so materialistic or so prideful or so whatever that denying yourself might even feel like betrayal. You might wonder if you'll even be yourself anymore – if there will be anything left. Jesus says that the person who loses his/her life for the sake of following Him will look back and say, "Losing my life was the best thing I ever did. When I did that I really began to live." You will actually discover your "self" for the first time; you'll discover who you really are.

25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?

The rich young ruler gained the whole world financially and yet forfeited his own soul (Mt. 19:16-26). Caiaphas the High Priest gained the whole world when it came to religious influence and yet he forfeited his own soul (Mt. 26:3-5). Herod gained the whole world when it came to political power, and yet he forfeited his own soul. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, wrote in Philippians 3 that he suffered the loss of all things (reputation, religious status, personal comfort)

in order to know Christ. Paul “lost his life” at incredible personal cost. But that’s when he really began to live.

Verse 26 reminds us that being apprenticed to Jesus eventually involves confessing Him before others. The person who is ashamed of Jesus obviously isn’t a disciple. Jesus’ comment:

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Ultimately we will either deny ourselves or we will deny Christ. When Christ returns He will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him. There’s really no way to soften Jesus’ statement here. Those who are ashamed of Him and do not follow Him through this life will not follow Him into the next. By contrast, we read elsewhere (Hebrews 2:11) that Jesus is not ashamed to be called the brother of those who live by faith.

And so the reward of discipleship is life – full to overflowing. If you apprentice yourself to Jesus, you will progressively experience more and more life. And you will be involved in Jesus’ mission of bringing light and life to all the groupings of people in the world. God will fill your life with significant things.

In light of the high stakes of discipleship – both the rewards of discipleship and the severe consequences of non-discipleship – I’d like for every person here to consider adopting Jesus’ pattern of discipleship for the next month. We’ve printed in your handout “A Daily Prayer for Disciples” that expresses the heart of what we’ve talked about today:

***A Daily Prayer for Disciples:*** “Jesus, I want to walk as Your disciple today. Therefore, I deny myself, saying ‘no’ to everything that hinders my discipleship. I take up my cross, dying to self and losing ‘my life’ in order that I might really live. May I not be ashamed of You today. Lord, lead and teach me as I follow You.”

Consider using this prayer to express your desire to follow Jesus’ pattern of discipleship. You could pray this prayer verbatim or you could use it as a launching point to express specific ways that you need to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. You could tape it on your mirror or keep it in your Bible or put it on your refrigerator to remind you to pray. You could pray it once a day or 3 times a day (David prayed morning, noon, and night).

Whatever works for you, consider using this prayer daily for the next month. Let’s put ourselves in a position to be apprenticed to Him. No matter where you think you are in your spiritual journey, this is a place to start. You don’t start by screwing up all the willpower you have and trying as hard as you can. You start by apprenticing yourself to Jesus. Then you live in anticipation that Jesus will teach you how to live and will involve you deeply in what He’s doing in this world.