

**SERIES: CHRIST-CULTURE-CHURCH
SERMON: DISCIPLESHIP IS EXTREME
9-15-24**

OPENER:

Remember the call that Jesus makes to us.....

First call: A call to come and follow Him.

Second Call: A call to a commitment to obey Him.

Third Call: A call to die to self.

A disciple of Jesus who has answered His call, has all of the following characteristics, which we will talk about today:

- 1. Has made Jesus Lord of His life and has taken up his cross.**
- 2. Has personal abandonment and absolute trust in Jesus.**
- 3. Lives in a daily posture of repentance.**

1. DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WHEN YOU ANSWER CHRIST'S CALL TO FOLLOW

When does a person become a disciple of Jesus?

A person becomes a disciple the moment they take up their cross to follow Him.

Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

"If" Jesus said. "If" is the determining factor. Most people will not take this step. Jesus says, "If" you want to follow me you must do two things:

No. 1: Deny yourself

No. 2: Die to yourself

In his interactions with others, Jesus often got straight to the point. His call to discipleship in is no exception: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

**YOU DON'T FINALLY ARRIVE AT SOME POINT IN BECOMING A DISCIPLE
IN YOUR WALK WITH BECOMING A DISCIPLE.**

**DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS AT THE MOMENT YOU ANSWER THE CALL TO
FOLLOW JESUS.**

**DISCIPLESHIP EQUALS SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS BEARING.
PERIOD.**

>But what does Jesus mean by “*deny himself*”?

>What does the ultimate cross-bearer mean by “take up his cross,” since Jesus’s cross and our cross cannot accomplish the same thing?

>And why does he use such a harsh metaphor to describe discipleship?

We vaguely understand self-denial and cross-bearing to mean that discipleship is probably difficult and that self is somehow a problem. But if we rely on our associations with these ideas to flesh them out, we will likely misunderstand Jesus’s meaning.

Side note - Common misunderstandings of cross bearing:

For instance, if we consider how we pursue self-denial, we might think that taking up our cross is all about denying our desires. Because “self” refers to us and what we want, we add a direct object to “deny himself,” so that it becomes “Deny himself or to Deny ourself things.” Whether that be material objects or immaterial things. Yes denying your flesh the evil desires and overcoming the temptations in this world is truly what it means to being a disciple of Jesus. But Denying the self’s desires is not all that it means. For instance, some desires are from God and the Bible promises that God meets he desires of our heart.

And sometimes we take it further: we ignore the self. Because we know ourselves to be sinful, we may consider anything originating out of the self as sinful, if not threatening or wrong. And we have a dreading sense of condemnation that looms over us. So, fearful of being too self-focused and inward-gazing, we create a false understanding in which we have no self-examination.

Cross-bearing is even more misunderstood. When we say, “We all have our crosses to bear” This thinking is applied to a variety of difficulties, from being used in jest (to expressing frustration over minor inconveniences , to

describing truly difficult situations like temptations, long-term sickness, or difficult relationships.

These readings are dangerous because they're based on partial truths. Of course, we should be wary of the self. Of course, the Christian life is one that involves suffering. But each of these misinterpretations misses what Christ is asking for.

What did Jesus mean when he said deny yourself and take up your cross? The Greek verb translated here a "to deny" is "*aparneomai*" (*a-pad-a-na-omi*)

to "disown" or "renounce." For example, this is the verb used when Peter "denies" Jesus. He denies that he knows Jesus or has any association with him.

Self-denial, then, is intentional disowning of self, or stepping away from relationship with the self as primary. Jesus is making a statement about who we are most closely associated with. Who is our primary allegiance to — him, or to ourselves?

Note: Historical Practice of Cross-Bearing

Jesus made this statement about taking up one's cross before he was crucified. Although the metaphor would certainly gain a fuller meaning after his death, it must have meant something to his listeners beforehand as well.

Crucifixion was reserved specifically for offenders who had rebelled against authority. To "take up one's cross" referred to the practice of forcing a condemned person to carry the cross beam to his execution site. This showed that although he had rebelled against authority, the condemned person was now so completely conquered that his last act in life would be to carry the instrument of his demise to the place of his death.

Cross bearing was a show of complete and utter submission.

A CALL TO BEAR ONE'S CROSS AS PART OF FOLLOWING JESUS. IT IS A CALL TO BE SUBMITTED TO CHRIST JUST AS THE CONDEMNED CRIMINAL WAS TO HIS DEATH.

SO WHEN JESUS CALLS FOR SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS-BEARING HE'S CLAIMING AUTHORITY.

**FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS DISOWNING SELF AND GIVING ALLEGIANCE TO HIM INSTEAD.
AND IT MEANS GIVING HIM ALLEGIANCE DOWN TO THE VERY DEPTHS OF OUR BEING.**

2. DYING TO SELF IS NOT A PERIODIC PRACTICE

DISCIPLES ARE NEVER WITHOUT THEIR CROSS

We aren't occasionally called to pick up a certain cross; we are called to an entire way of life. We often speak of whether we are willing to "count the cost" of discipleship.

THE REAL ISSUE IS NOT THE COSTLINESS OF FOLLOWING JESUS - IT'S OUR WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW HIM REGARDLESS OF THE COST. THE GREATNESS OR LITTLENESS OF THE COST IS NOT THE MAIN EMPHASIS - ALL OF LIFE IS TO BE SURRENDERED TO HIM.

WE AREN'T OCCASIONALLY CALLED TO PICK UP A CERTAIN CROSS; WE ARE CALLED TO AN ENTIRE WAY OF LIFE.

Jesus said, "*take up YOUR cross*". You have one cross to bear from the moment you begin to follow Jesus to the end of your life when you follow Him into heaven.

3. A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF SELF IS NECESSARY FOR DISCIPLESHIP

If self-denial and cross-bearing are actually calls to surrender the self, then the self but well-known and well-examined.

>How can we submit what we do not recognize?

> How can we surrender what we are unaware of?

Spending time examining our hearts, studying our motives, desires, and sin in discipleship is necessary.

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

If I want to know what I look like, I look in a mirror. If I want to know what to correct I look at my image in a mirror.

If you want to know what to correct in your soul then you look into the Word.

**THE WORD OF GOD HELPS US KNOW OURSELVES.
THE WORD OF GOD IS USED TO IDENTIFY WITHIN US WHAT NEEDS TO
BE CORRECTED AND SUBMITTED TO CHRIST.**

THE WORD IS GOD IS TO BE USED FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4. DISCIPLESHIP IS EXTREME

The seemingly harsh language of Jesus's call is intended to make this clear. There are no halfway measures in following Christ. It's all or nothing.

**DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT A HOBBY BUT A TOTAL AND COMPLETE
ALLEGIANCE TO JESUS IS EVERY CORNER OF OUR HEART.**

Christ calls us to exclusive allegiance and complete submission to him.

When we come to Jesus we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord. You can't have Jesus as just Savior and not have Him as Lord also. We ask Jesus to be Savior and Lord. Jesus is both things at the same time.

Jesus does not want us to put Him at the top of our list of things to do for the day.

He does not want us to check off our time with him like we would check off items on a grocery list or a list of household chores. Jesus wants to be the center of our lives.

Jesus wants everything in our lives to flow through our relationship with Him. This is totally different than making Him part of a to do list.