

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**Sunday March 6, 2022. "How do we: pick up our cross daily?"**

### **I Intro.**

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're now well in 2022 and we've got some big things planned. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can check all that out through our social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

### **II Sunday.**

We finally finished our Genius series, and we started kind of an unusual one as we enter the season of Lent. The series is entitled; "***The Bible Says What?!***", and the purpose is to hit some of the harder sayings of Jesus. Let me give this some context first. And bear with me. First, the collection of writings contained in scripture is far from cohesive and easy to make sense of. Now this may feel blasphemous to say. But if we take scripture seriously, actually do real work in reading it, and try to interpret it as how we should live, there are things that can feel really confusing and almost contradictory. I could fill pages with examples, but that conversation is better in person. So, the primary foundation for this series is to create a safe place for us to admit that sometimes it's VERY difficult to make sense of what certain scripture is saying, and how we're supposed to apply it to our everyday life. The fact that scholars and experts over the years have vehemently disagreed about what certain passages and teachings mean just proves this point. Which gives us permission to struggle also.

Second, our understanding of scripture is as much rooted in how we were raised, our spiritual background, as it is having a correct understanding. The more honest we are about that, the more honestly we can approach scripture. And that also includes people who didn't grow up in any faith system, and their hesitancy or discomfort with scripture.

Third, and finally, our conversation around each of these passages will NOT be answers. Which will be kind of a rub for us. We love answers, and just want to know the things we're supposed to know or do to live how God has called us to. Our understanding of God, scripture, and how to live will always be more a process of growth than just acquiring answers. This is because we have to leave room for the mystery of God. We will never have answers, but we can always be working towards a growing understanding and a relationship. And that's the entire goal of this series. We need to wrestle with these thoughts about reading scripture before we talk about picking up our cross.

**What was taught and expected about reading scripture when you were growing up?**

**Have you rethought or changed any of those positions?**

**Are there any places, or scripture passages you struggle with now? Why or why not?**

**What does the mystery of God mean to you?**

Okay, I apologize for such a lengthy beginning and set up, but our view and approach to scripture is so essential in understanding any topic. Especially the more difficult teachings of Jesus. And we need to be okay with some people wanting to ask questions out loud.

So, the first **“Bible Says What?”** issue is when Jesus said; **“Take up your cross and follow me”**. The primary passage was **Luke 9:23-26**. Read it and answer the questions.

**How do you interpret, understand, what Jesus meant when he said; “take up your cross”?**

**How do you wrestle with a literal or figurative interpretation?**

**What helps or guides you to your understanding?**

This passage talks about three essential elements to picking up our cross.

**1. Self denial.** This is what our ‘surrender’ message was about. Being keenly aware of what your personal interests, desires, appetites are, and doing the inner work of not letting them rule your life. This also includes not misusing your power. When you’re in public, with others, voting, working, etc. is your fundamental guiding ethic, one of not using your power and influence for your own benefit. Self denial is deciding to not make life about you. This is emptying yourself of...yourself.

**2. Pick up YOUR cross...DAILY.** This is the hard **“WHUUUT?!?”** thing. Once you decide not to make life about you, emptying yourself of wanting to fulfill your own desires, then it's starting to do things that make it about others. The cross is Jesus intentionally emptying himself, and then actually making the choice to sacrifice his life. Your cross is **your public sacrifice, practice of dying to self, that others can see and benefits others**. It's trusting God will care for you in the process of dying to self. Your practice of salvation. Not to ‘be saved’ but the transformational work being done within you. Doesn't have to be an extreme example, it's daily looking for places to serve.

**3. Commitment to personal obedience.** (Follow me) Last verse in this passage is the most difficult and easily twisted. We virtually always use this on other people...who live differently than we do. This commitment is where the previous two decisions and actions are born out of. Deciding your entire worldview and ethic will be to put personal interests aside. It's being Wesley in **“The Princess Bride”**. **“As you wish”**. The commitment is to decide to follow Jesus. The **“If”** Jesus starts this teaching with.

These three elements are clearly stated by Jesus as the ‘process’, what we’ve talked about following him, as we **“take up our cross”**. Each of these comes with a specific understanding of a choice we must make about how we live our life. **Do you struggle in any of these areas and how so?**

### **III Challenge.**

On this first Sunday we hit a topic that seems the most familiar and the most foreign. We know about the cross. But since we don't have crucifixions today, then trying to interpret this one is really difficult. But don't be consumed with trying to get the right answer. It's not about knowing. Again, this is a process, and it's committing to the work of the lessening of self, and the commitment towards Jesus. As always, I'll ask these final questions.

**What is one step you could take towards the work of committing to personal obedience, denying yourself, and picking up your cross...daily?**

**What could help you stick to your commitment?**