

Our mission at Fellowship is *calling each other to live out our God given purpose every day*. That has been the heartbeat of our church the last six years and we have seen many discover their unique purpose, their two words, and begin to live that out. But here's something we may not say enough. Our unique purpose is only half of our purpose. The other half is our common purpose. The Westminster Catechism says it is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." And that's pretty good. But I believe Jesus may have said it best in **[John 15:9] 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love**. Our common purpose is to abide in Christ. Abide is a word that means remain or stay, to make Jesus our home. Through it, Jesus invites us into a love relationship with God and out of that relationship he bears fruit in our lives, including our unique purpose.

As we prepared for this ministry year the Spirit led us to a decision to live out our mission by focusing on abiding, and over the next nine months you will see ministry and tools and sermons dedicated to that foundational purpose. But as we planned this year, we realized there was a problem. You don't just fall into abiding. I could come out here every Sunday and say, "Hey Fellowship, go abide in Jesus this week." But abiding is active and intentional and focused, and **you can only abide in whatever, or whoever, is at the center of your life**. If you are like me, you have an almost infinite number of things competing for that spot. So, if we are going to abide in Christ, we have to make room to do so, and that making room comes at a cost.

Anyone else notice things are getting more expensive these days? We are experiencing record levels of inflation, and everything from groceries to gas to hair care products cost more. And every time we go to buy something and see how expensive it is, we ask the question "Is this worth it?" Is this valuable enough for me to exchange it for my hard-earned dollars? Some things we say yes, some things we say no. But that decision-making process isn't limited to groceries. We are asking the same question in our spiritual lives. The difference is the price tag. According to Jesus, the cost of our discipleship is "Everything". If we are to truly abide in him it will cost us all we are, all we have, all we do. And with a price tag that big, we all ask, "Is it worth the cost?"

This morning we begin a series to ask and answer that question. We are going to spend the next eight weeks in the gospel of Luke wrestling with some of the most difficult, challenging things Jesus ever said that will confront our beliefs, how we are living our lives, and what we are missing out on if our discipleship is only half-hearted. Through it, we will let Jesus answer the question "Is it worth it?" by showing us and inviting us into the Christian life that is a massive trade up from anything else we might try. My prayer is that we will answer that question with an emphatic "yes!" and pay the cost to put Christ at the center and experience the full life found only by abiding in him.

To begin, though, we need to make a distinction about what Jesus is and is not addressing. Last week I saw this sign at the grocery store. "Free Delivery, \$99/year." Anyone see an issue with it? It's free, but it will cost you. Now, nothing against Tom Thumb. I love it and have spent \$1billion feeding three growing boys over the last 20 years. But their offer is confusing. And when we read the words of Jesus, we may ask the question about our salvation. Is it free or do we have to pay for it? It's free. You are saved by grace, through faith. Jesus paid the entire cost of your salvation and we receive the free gift by placing our faith in him, letting his life count for ours, and letting his death pay for our sins. If you've never done that, I invite you to do so this

morning, because everything we are going to talk about in this series is for those who are children of God and followers of Jesus. This is a series about discipleship. If you've trusted in Christ, you are his forever. The question before us now is will we give all of ourselves to the one who gave all of himself to us.

**[Luke 9:23-27] <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."**

At the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus has sent out the Twelve to proclaim the Kingdom and is now developing a following. So he takes this opportunity to begin to lay out what it really means to be his follower, the first of many challenging sayings. It's clear following will not be easy. Jesus gives three commands that are essentially the pathway and practice of discipleship. They could very easily be the answer to the question "What is God's will for my life?"

**Deny yourself:** There are few statements more counter-cultural than this one. We live in a world that says look out for #1, demand your rights, you do you, you deserve it, you can have it all. All of those put us at the center of our lives. But not so for the Christian. We are to say no to ourselves. We are to make our good and our agenda secondary. That could be a small thing like giving someone else the right of way, patience, not having to get the last word, or pushing away your plate before taking one more bite. We might hear that list and say "Yeah, I can do that." But Jesus gives us the extent of our self-denial.

**Pick up your cross:** Jesus uses the imagery of an instrument of death to tell us the call of discipleship is one of death. Not to make a few concessions for Jesus from time to time, but to die to ourselves. By it he means we are to put to death anything not in alignment with God's will. That means all sin. It could mean a relationship you know is no good for you, fighting for a marriage you're tired of, saying no to even good things because they take you away from what is essential, using your resources only for yourself. Ultimately, Jesus is telling us to kill anything competing for the center of our lives other than him. What just popped into your mind? The Lord may be showing you something. Listen.

But the cross has a second meaning. In the Roman world, a condemned person would be forced to carry their cross publicly as a sign of submission to the state and a tacit admission the state was right. We see that in Jesus's crucifixion. For us, Jesus calls us to take up our cross as a public declaration that he is right and we belong to him. Why does he use this imagery?

Well, look at the passage before. In chapter 9 there's the amazing scene at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asks his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answers "the Christ." We'll be there in February, by the way. One of the best parts of the trip. Jesus agreed with Peter's assessment, and then explained what it means to be the Christ.

**[Luke 9:21-22] <sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, “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.**

As the Christ, Jesus would have to be rejected, suffer, and die on the cross. And if you follow the one who was rejected, you too will walk the path of rejection. If you follow the one who suffered, you too will walk the path of suffering. The cost of following includes our comfort, our reputation, and even our safety. You can try to avoid it by keeping your faith a secret – Jesus calls that being ashamed of him - but you’ll miss out because the boundaries we establish to avoid suffering become barriers to intimacy with Christ. The call of discipleship is to entrust our spiritual and physical wellbeing to the Lord, just as Jesus entrusted himself to the Father.

**Follow me:** As we deny ourselves and take up our cross, we are positioned to follow Jesus. We are to go where he goes, do what he does, become what he is. We cannot do that if we are encumbered with our own agenda and desires. And so Jesus calls us to this daily dying of self so that we can follow him. There’s a challenge and good news in that. The challenge is that our following of Jesus is not just a one-and-done, a trust the Lord and see you in heaven after this life. Yes, eternity is secure, but Jesus calls us into a self-denying daily relationship with him. The good news is that it’s never too late to start. Every day is an opportunity to follow Jesus, but that will only happen if you pay the cost.

So then what do you think would happen if you went to the DART station or over to Northpark and told people, “I’ve got a great new way of life for you. You’ll have to deny yourself, die, and follow a guy who lived 2,000 years ago and was executed. You in?” How would most people respond? They’d say you’re crazy. That’s what so much of the world thinks of the Christian life. That our faith is simply living out a list of “Thou shalt nots”, not having any fun, missing out on the pleasures of life, and believing an antiquated fairy tale with oppressive beliefs. Their answer to “Is it worth it?” is “No way!” How would you respond to that? Well, Jesus responds.

**[Luke 9:24] “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”** Jesus is drawing a line and showing a stark contrast between two choices. One the one side is your life defined by your agenda and on the other side is your life defined by Jesus’s agenda, and the implication is it’s infinitely better. We can have only one or the other. If we try to preserve our life/our agenda, we will miss out on the life he has for us.

It's like a shirt currently hanging in my closet right now. How many of you grew up with a clear distinction between play clothes and work/school clothes? It was a big deal in my house and it still messes me up with my clothing today. I’ve had a shirt hanging in my closet, with the tags still on, for the last six months. It’s not a particularly fancy shirt. It’s a cotton polo that, between you and me, makes me look jacked. But I’ve struggled to put it on because I’m trying to preserve its newness. I don’t want to use it up, so it’s sat in my closet, saved up and still brand new. But you know the problem? It’s not fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. My desire to save it has kept it from clothing me. So I’ve lost.

We do the same thing with our lives. We try to hang on to our agenda, preserve the life we want for ourselves, our impulses, pleasures, desires, plan, comfort, security, sin. We convince

ourselves that we can keep all that stuff while also living the life Jesus has for us, following him, living out our God-given purpose. Or we try to meet Jesus in the middle and keep a little of our agenda and take a little of Jesus' agenda. Jesus, I'll give you this marriage I'm about to step into, but I won't live faithfully to you beforehand. Jesus, you can have 80% of my finances but I'm keeping 20% for myself. I'll go to church sometimes, but I'm not getting involved.

Why do we do that? We want control. No one is the boss of me. We idolize ease and comfort. We covet the praise of man and don't want to be canceled or condemned for our faith. We question the heart of Jesus (see our last series). Like me, a lot of us sometimes don't believe the life Jesus has for us can top the life we want to create for ourselves. When we believe any of those, we won't pay the cost. Jesus says we are missing out.

You see, the more you try to hold onto/save your life, the less you can live into the life Christ has for you. **The Christian life is not about adding Jesus to what we are already doing. The Christian life is about reorienting all of who we are and what we do around him.** It is then, and only then, that we can live the life Jesus has for us. But to do that, we have to believe it's worth the cost. That we are trading up. Do you believe that? Are you at least open to the idea that the Christian life is better?

To answer that we need to really need to soberly assess what we are looking to fill us up. Is that pace you're living really life-giving? Is all that stuff making you happy? Just a little more and all will be good? Is being accepted by people who have no interest in the Lord really affirming your identity? Is that sin that gives you pleasure for a couple of seconds really satisfying? Is all that screen time filling your heart? Are the countless hours in youth sports causing our kids to love Jesus more? If we are honest, we know it's a lie. You are saving what you can't keep, preserving what won't last, giving your heart to what won't fulfill. If we are honest, we know we want something more, and Jesus has it for us. He should know because he did exactly what he's calling you to. When asking "Is it worth it?" "...

**[Hebrews 12:2] Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Jesus denied himself. He stepped out of heaven, took on flesh, and stepped into this broken world to save it. And you know what he got? Joy. Jesus took up his cross, figuratively for three years of ministry and being rejected time and time again and then literally as he marched through the streets of Jerusalem and ultimately climbed upon it to pay for the sins of the world. And you know the result? Joy. Jesus followed the will of his Father, all the way into a tomb. And you know what he got? Joy.

When you follow the one who paid the cost and experienced joy, you too will walk the path of abundant joy. That's the life Jesus has for you because that's the life he lived himself.

**What is it costing you?** That's the question we all need to answer throughout this series. We have handout on the way out to help you ask that question. And it's a two-sided question. On the one hand, it's a question for us to look at what we are paying to follow Christ. Is it everything? Something? Nothing at all? As we assess that, we ask it the other way to see what it is costing us if we are not denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus. What joy does Jesus have for you that you can't get to because you're not willing to give up your life for the one he has for you? **Jesus does not want to shame you, but he does want to challenge you because he has more for you.**