

Follow me.

"Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how.

Mark 8:34 MSG

I remember sitting out on my front porch one summer evening and just loving the fact that I didn't have to go anywhere or do anything. I could just sit and enjoy the sunset and listen to the sound of the wind & the bugs ☺. The reason that this was so obvious to me was that for 10 years prior to this moment, we had not had a summer to ourselves. We had been running a kid's summer camp and that meant that every evening we would be down at the back of the property joining in 'campfire time' with all of the kids sometimes leading, sometimes listening; but always available to help if necessary.

God had given us time off this particular year. We were tired and ready for a break. So, here I was sitting and soaking in the quiet of the night and guess what I could hear in the distance? That's right, I could hear the kids over at Circle Square Ranch (a few kilometers away) hollering and singing at the top of their lungs during 'campfire time'! Somehow the wind was carrying it to me. I laughed as I found my position on our front lawn so funny, but wonderful...

It was in this moment that I felt God speak to me. He challenged me very specifically as I sat in my 'boy I'd like to stay in this spot forever kind of mode'. He started to

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question me like He did with Peter in John 21:15-19 where He asked him 3 times if he loved Him & then gave him instructions to feed & take care of His sheep. I started to get uncomfortable as I knew what direction this was all heading. I could hear Him asking, *'Do you love me?'* and I responded every time in the affirmative. Feed my lambs, He said. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep. My spirit was challenged out of complacency and deeply moved... I started to weep.

And then I heard Him say, "Follow Me".

We left off last week at the end of chapter 8. I'd like us to go back there again and take a closer look at verses 31-38. Make sure you read it before you go ahead.

- Prior to this passage is the scene where Peter has a revelation moment from God & really seems to get who Jesus is.
- Jesus praises Peter for his recognition of Him (see [Matthew 16:17-19](#)) and commissions him.

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter,^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

- And then Peter blows it again! Jesus tells them that He must suffer, die and rise again and Peter pulls Him aside and tries to correct Him! At first glance this is astonishing to me, but then when I consider all that Peter has just been told by Jesus I feel somewhat compassionate:
 - He has just had an amazing revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the almighty One ... how could somebody possibly conquer & kill Him?
 - Jesus had just paid him one of the highest compliments declaring that His Church would be built on him & that even hell would not be able to thwart that destiny.
 - He has also been told that he could bind anything on earth & in heaven
 - Peter's confidence & exuberance is at a peak and in his zealotry for his Messiah, forgets to listen properly. He rebukes the very person that He has just declared to be God's Son... who cannot possibly utter anything but the truth.
 - We too can learn from this. Emotion & confidence is not always truth.

Peter is a perfect example of how a sincere heart coupled with man's thinking can often lead to disaster.

(David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible)

"Get behind Me, Satan! This was a strong rebuke from Jesus, yet entirely appropriate. Though a moment before Peter spoke as a messenger of God, he then spoke as a messenger of Satan. Jesus knew there was a satanic purpose in discouraging Him from His ministry on the cross, and Jesus would not allow that purpose to succeed. We can be sure that Peter was not aware that he spoke for Satan, just as a moment before he was not aware that he spoke for God. It is often much easier to be a tool of God or of the devil than we want to believe. You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men: Jesus exposes how Peter came into this satanic way of thinking. He didn't make a deliberate choice to reject God and embrace Satan; he simply let his mind settle on the things of men instead of the things of God, and Satan took advantage of it. Peter is a perfect example of how a sincere heart coupled with man's thinking can often lead to disaster. Peter's rebuke of Jesus is an evidence of the leaven mentioned in [Mark 8:15](#). With his mind on the things of men, Peter only saw the Messiah as the embodiment of power and strength, instead of as a suffering servant. Because Peter couldn't handle a suffering Messiah, he rebuked Jesus." (David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible)

In all honesty (& embarrassment!), I am realizing that I am a lot like Peter! I don't think that I would have understood everything going on in that moment and I don't want suffering. I'm afraid to think that I may have responded in a similar manner.

And then Jesus responds with this: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. Mark 8:34-35

These are hard words to hear, but true. Jesus gives stern warning to us to be mindful to do what He says so that we do not forfeit our inheritance with Him. He tells us to run away from temptations and situations that are too much for us to handle. We need to face things honestly and learn to know our boundaries of safety. Get rid of, shut down, walk away, remove the things that hinder us from being all that we are meant to be.



Look up these verses and make comments on them. What are we told to do with the stuff that messes us up?

Mark 9:43-48

2 Timothy 2:22

As we look at these scriptures be encouraged, for Jesus never asked us to do anything that He would not do. If He asks us to deny ourselves it is because He did, if He asks us to take up our cross, it is also because He did. He knows the suffering & the joy of obedience to God. At this point we just have to read Hebrews 12:1-3. I'm going to give it to you from The Message Bible:

Jesus never asked us to do anything that He would not do.

“Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!”

***And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.
2 Corinthians 5:15***

OK. Now let's go back to the key verse for today and break it down to the three phrases that I've highlighted...

*When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him **deny himself**, and **take up his cross**, and **follow Me**. Mark 8:34.*

1. Deny Self FORGET ONE'S SELF, LOSE SIGHT OF ONE'S SELF AND ONE'S OWN INTERESTS

"Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will." (Wiersbe)

"While He is totally transforming me, He is making me more myself than ever before."

Jesus was remarkable with His words! He was always taking things in directions that just messed with people's heads. When you hear the phrase '**deny yourself**' what does that conjure up in your mind? (be honest 😊)

Read Mark 9:33-35. What was it the disciples were discussing? What was Jesus' answer to them?

- who was the greatest (vs. 34)
- If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all. (vs. 35)

Now look at Mark 10:35-45. What did James & John want from Jesus? What was Jesus' answer to them?

- They wanted something that He could not give them, to sit at either side of His throne in Heaven
- Whoever desires to be great, must be a servant. For even He came to serve and give His life a ransom for many. (vs. 45)

2 Take up TO RAISE UP, ELEVATE, LIFT UP **Your** PERSONAL **Cross** AN UPRIGHT STAKE, ESP. A POINTED ONE

A cross: a well known instrument of most cruel and ignominious punishment, borrowed by the Greeks and Romans from the Phoenicians; to it were affixed among the Romans, down to the time of Constantine the Great, the guiltiest criminals...

- The cross represented execution and death.

- Anyone carrying a cross knew he could not save himself, that his conviction was irreversible.

Read Mark 10:17-22. This is a sad encounter of a very wealthy man with Jesus. Like Nicodemus, he wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life; he had a sense that something was missing from his own experience. Jesus, in familiar form questions him about the commandments of Moses and whether he was following them. The man responds that he has kept them all from his youth. This guy was loyal and upright before God.

But Jesus, goes deeper. This man's diligence to the law was no longer enough. We see into the compassionate heart of Jesus who consistently speaks the truth to all of us but always out of His great love for us. Look again at verse 21: *Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."*

Don't you just see Jesus' eyes?! Oh, but the SBible tells us that this man left very sad that day because he wasn't able to do what Jesus asked; he wasn't yet able to 'take up his cross & follow'.

Do you see the challenge? God requires us to give everything to Him, not just the stuff that needs fixing; everything: the sin and the good stuff, the pain and abilities, the bad choices as well as our successes, our destinies, our plans, our resources, our very lives. He requires us to give Him the lead.

3. Follow TO FOLLOW ONE WHO PRECEDES, JOIN HIM AS HIS ATTENDANT, ACCOMPANY HIM, TO JOIN ONE AS A DISCIPLE

- Matthew 10:38 (NIV) ... *anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*
- John 10:27 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

Jesus continues on to explain what he was telling the rich man. Read Mark 10:23-31. ...how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God (vs. 24)

...but with God all things are possible (vs. 27)

...Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses & brothers & sister & mothers & children & lands, *with persecutions* – and in the age to come, eternal life. *But many who are first will be last and the last first.*

Jesus never promised things would be easy. In fact He stated the opposite. (See Matthew 10:22; Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 6:22; Luke 21:17) His destiny was His cross... and so is ours. I know these are hard sayings, but look at this from the perspective of eternity.

Jesus endured the shame of the cross for the joy that was before Him. He saw things through His Father's eyes. He could see that because He served, laid His life down and bore our sins, we would be free to be in Him & He in us, and He would be crowned King of kings!

And what was that joy? Listen to what Matthew Henry has to say: *The joy of fulfilling the will of the Father, Psalms 40:6-8, every man; and having endured the cross and despised the shame of this ignominious death, He is set down at the right hand of God, ever appearing in the presence of God for us, and continuing his exhibition of himself as our Sacrifice, and his intercession as our Mediator. See the notes on "Heb 10:5", different other explanations given of this clause, but I think that here offered is the most natural. It never can, in any sense, be said of Jesus that he endured the cross, prospect of gaining an everlasting glory; when he had the fullness of that glory with the Father before the world began; John 17:5. (Matthew Henry Concise)*

He was delightfully determined to suffer for the cause of His Father & His children. Oh, what a wonderful Saviour! What a wonderful example for us to follow. Totally serving the destiny of others and in so doing, fulfilling His own.

I'D LIKE TO END THIS STUDY WITH AN EXCERPT FROM C. S. LEWIS. I HOPE YOU ARE ENCOURAGED THROUGH IT TO SEE BEYOND THE SUFFERING, FOR THE JOY THAT IS AHEAD OF US, THE GOLD THAT IS FORMED IN THE FIRE FAR OUTWEIGHS ANYTHING WE MAY SUFFER TODAY. (Romans 8:18)

COUNTING THE COST, BY C. S. LEWIS:

"The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ.

"Christ says 'Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: **I want You.** I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: My own will shall become yours.'...

"When I was a child I often had toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother—at least not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain, but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie. If you gave them an inch they would take a mile.

"Now, if I may put it that way, our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take a mile. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of... or which is obviously spoiling daily life (like bad temper or drunkenness). Well, He will cure it alright: but He will not stop there. That may be all you ask; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment. That is why He warned people to 'count the cost' before becoming Christians. 'Make no mistake,' He says, 'If you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less or other than that.'

"Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life... whatever it cost Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect--until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.'

"The goal toward which He is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection; and no power in the whole universe, except you yourself, can prevent Him from taking you to that goal. That is what you are in for. And it is very important to realize that. If we do not, then we are very likely to start pulling back and resisting Him after a certain point. I think that many of us, when Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two sins that were an obvious nuisance, are inclined to feel (though we do not put it into words) that we are now good enough. He has done all we wanted Him to do. And we should be obliged if He would now leave us alone.

"But this is the fatal mistake... The question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what He intended us to be when He made us....

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you know that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of--throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace.

He intends to come and live in it Himself!"