

Daily Embrace the Lord's Will

Luke 9:23b

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Last Sunday night, over 60 people from all generations gathered for a two-hour time of prayer in the Worship Center led by Pastor Kyle and the Mainspring ministry. 15 people led this guided prayer time, following the acrostic CHAT (Confession, Honor, Ask and Thanks). There were times of silent and corporate prayer.

We began by focusing on the names and attributes of God as we remembered His faithfulness. Then, we moved to a time of both personal and corporate confession. I was gripped by Reagan LaBerge's words to set up our prayer of confession: *"Overall, we don't typically think about corporate confession when we are confessing our sins. Usually, we tend to think about our own sins, if we confess at all. But when we look to the Scriptures, we see that God holds both individuals and communities accountable for their sins...unless we fully feel the weight of our sin, and the ugliness of it all, we cannot see how badly we are in need of rescue."* Then, we confessed the sins of racism, abortion, human trafficking, and pornography.

This was followed by interceding for the persecuted church, unreached people groups, our global and community Go Team partners, our country, and for our spheres of influence.

Also, I was impacted when Chasity Holmquist led in prayer for the persecuted church and Shalom Warrington prayed for unreached people groups. Both of these women wept while they interceded. It hit me the only way persecuted Christians are able to remain faithful is because they have engaged their *desire*, they are *denying* themselves, they have *died* by carrying their cross and they are *devoted* to fully follow Christ. Then, I had this thought – the only way the unreached will be reached is if people like us will line up our *desires* with His, if we *deny* ourselves, if we *die* by taking up our cross, and if we are totally *devoted* to Him.

We ended by thanking God for His faithfulness, for the highs and lows of life, for God's provision and protection and for us to line our lives up with His will. It was extremely moving. One couple told me they had not experienced a two-hour prayer time since college.

Christianity was never designed to be comfortable or for us to approach our relationship with Christ casually. No, Jesus Christ is looking for devoted disciples who are completely committed to Him. He doesn't want fickle fans; He wants faithful followers.

As I mentioned last weekend, we're taking three weeks to drill down into one verse, Luke 9:23: "***And He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'***" We summarized the sermon this way: *Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.*

After considering the call to discipleship, we fleshed out two of the four conditions of discipleship.

- **Desire.** First, a person must *desire* to be a disciple – "***If anyone would come after me...***"
- **Denial.** The second condition is a call to *deny self*: "***...let him deny himself...***"
- **Death.** Today, our focus is on the third condition – *death*. We see this in the next phrase: "***...and take up his cross daily...***"
- **Devotion.** Next weekend we'll unpack the importance of devotion: "***...and follow me.***"

Listen to Luke 9:23 again: "***And He said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'***" Let's look at this third condition more closely: "***...and take up his cross daily...***"

The word "***and***" could be translated "*also*," indicating what comes next is a continuation from the conditional clause before it: "***If anyone would come after me, let Him deny Himself and...***" After making sure we *desire* to be a disciple, and we're *denying* ourselves, the next step is to "***take up his cross daily.***"

To "***take up***" means, "*to pick up.*" It essentially means "*to lift from the ground*" and is an aorist imperative, meaning it's a command to do it now, with no delay.

Interestingly, in Matthew 14:20, after feeding the 5,000, we read the disciples "***took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.***" After bending over to pick up leftovers, now they are called to humble themselves and pick up the very thing that will take their lives. The same word is found in Matthew 11:29 when

Jesus said, ***“Take my yoke upon you.”*** It was also used of Simon of Cyrene when he was compelled to carry the cross of Christ.

The command to ***“take up”*** shows crosses are not forced on our backs because they don’t come against our will. The cross is not something we HAVE to lift; it’s a burden we CHOOSE to bear for Christ’s sake. To ***“take up”*** is a conscious decision to be a cross-bearer by picking up what is difficult, and distasteful, and leads to death.

Note, Jesus said each one must ***“take up his cross.”*** Christ bore a cross we can never bear when He carried the collective weight of our sins and endured the righteous wrath of our holy God, resulting in our redemption and forgiveness. While Simon assisted Jesus with His cross, we are called to carry *our* cross, not His. Listen to the words from a hymn called, “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?” This was published in 1693.

*Should Simon bear His cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
And there’s a cross for me.*

In the introduction to Erwin Lutzer’s new book called, “We Will Not Be Silenced,” he quotes a Christian poet named Vasily Zhukovsky, *“We all have crosses to bear and we are constantly trying on different ones for a good fit.”* Lutzer adds, *“We’re always looking for the lightest cross to bear.”*

Charles Spurgeon told the story about a group of cross-bearers who were invited to bring their crosses and put them in a big pile. Then, they were told to pick up the one they liked best. Of course, no one took the one he or she had come with but went away with his neighbor’s cross on his back. After only a few hours, they returned, asking to have their old crosses back. They discovered the cross they had carried before had so worn their shoulders they had become used to the particular burden. The new cross was rubbing them in new places, so they were each glad to put their neighbor’s cross down and walk away with their own.

You are not called to carry someone else’s cross. You are to take up *your* cross and I’m to take up *mine*. Carrying your cross is unique and individualistic. Jesus cannot do it for you, nor can anyone else. Warren Wiersbe writes, *“Jesus did not*

stop with a private announcement of His own death. He also made a public declaration about a cross for every disciple.”

These words of Jesus must have sounded radical in the first century. Crucifixion was a common Roman punishment, with over 30,000 nailed to crosses throughout the Roman empire during the lifetime of Jesus. A few years earlier, before Jesus and His disciples arrived in Caesarea Philippi, 100 men had been crucified in the area. One person writes, *“At times, the roads around Jerusalem were lined with hundreds of crosses bearing dead and dying men, their bodies bloated in the sun, surrounded by flies, covered with maggots. It’s not a pretty thought or one calculated to win the masses.”*

Jesus picked the one image which would make the most people turn away. Everyone knew the cross was an instrument of shame, suffering, torture and death. When a person took up his cross, he was beginning a death march. Here are some questions to make the call of cross-bearing more personal.

- Are you willing to lose your closest friends?
- Are you willing to be alienated from your family?
- Are you willing to lose your reputation?
- Are you willing to lose your life?

That doesn’t mean all this will happen, but the key is to be ready for them to happen. In essence, cross-bearing means being willing to pay any price for Christ’s sake.

Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

Unfortunately, we have romanticized the cross by turning it into jewelry and artwork. When we do reference this verse, we often say something like, *“Well, I guess that’s just the cross I must bear”* and normally it refers to putting up with an obnoxious relative or living with an illness. Let’s remember the cross was carried by condemned criminals and ended with a humiliating and excruciating execution. To carry your cross meant you were bearing it until you eventually reached the place where you would be crucified. Everyone knew the person was saying goodbye to everything and there was no turning back.

We’re called to crucify the cult of self-fulfillment, self-promotion and self-centeredness. We’re to die to our rights – the right to be right, the right to take

revenge, and the right to fight. As J.C. Ryle puts it: *“A religion which costs nothing, is worth nothing.”*

Interestingly, according to almost universal tradition and archaeological evidence, the apostle Peter ended up literally fulfilling this when he was crucified on a cross, reportedly upside down. It’s reported 11 of the disciples died martyr’s deaths.

Christine Hoover writes:

“Nonetheless, the cross is relentless in my life; it pursues and crucifies my claims on self-rule and self-glory. The gospel, because it is by nature sacrificial, requires my self-sacrifice...the gospel lays claim to us all. Christ lays claim to our ambitions, our money, our minds, our work, our children, and, yes, even our sexual activity. We cannot lay out for the unconverted a Christianity that will ‘make life better,’ when in fact faith in Jesus often makes life more difficult because the priceless value of knowing Him comes at a cost to self. We become no longer our own; everything we are and do must be submitted to someone else—namely Christ.”

Unfortunately, we live in a time of “cheap grace” and “easy believism” where Christianity is more identified with health and wealth than with surrender, sacrifice and service. Oswald Chambers says, *“All Heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all Hell is terrified of it, while men are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning.”*

A number of years ago, a book came out which was made into a movie called, “Dead Men Walking.” It referred to a death row prisoner walking from his cell to the place to be executed. When he passed the other cells, the prisoners shouted, *“Dead Man Walking!”* The man was alive and walking but he was as good as dead. He was on a one-way journey he would not be coming back from.

Once, A.W. Tozer was asked what it means to take up your cross. Tozer answered by telling a story, *“A young man came to an older believer and asked, ‘What does it mean to be crucified?’ The older man thought for a bit and answered, ‘To be crucified means three things. First, the man who is crucified is facing only one direction. Second, the man on the cross is not going back. Third, the man on the cross has no further plans of his own.’”* That’s good. A disciple is facing one direction, he is not going back and has no further plans of his own.

Romans 12:1 challenges us to give our lives fully to the Lord: ***“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*** We’re to surrender ourselves as living sacrifices. As someone has observed, *“The problem with living sacrifices is they keep crawling off the altar!”*

Greg Allen offers this insight:

“To crucify a man was to expose him – naked and battered – for public ridicule and shame. It was to pin him – bleeding and in writhing agony – to beams of wood, suspended by his arms, until the life was slowly drained out of him. It was something so terrible that it was reserved for the vilest of criminals and scoundrels – the scum of the earth...To be forced to bear one’s own cross, then, was to be made to embrace its shame and humiliation. To carry it to the place of execution was to carry the instrument of one’s own dying. To bear the cross was the polar opposite of embracing the right to ‘self.’”

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Don’t miss this: death is to be **“daily.”** The need for dying to self is never finished in this life. It must be a daily decision of the will because discipleship is a daily discipline where we follow Jesus one step at a time, one day at a time. A.T. Pierson says, *“Getting rid of the ‘self-life’ is like peeling an onion: layer upon layer – and it’s a tearful process.”* Each day, every day, today, you and I must decide to die to self and identify with Christ in surrender, suffering and sacrifice. This is not to be an occasional occurrence, only when we feel like it. Rather, it is to be a response of obedience every day.

Why must I do this daily? Because every morning when I get up my flesh wants to be fed, my desires want to dominate, and my will wants what I want. As someone said, *“Fallen flesh is still depraved flesh and is not dead.”*

Recently, Pastor Dan and I met with a young couple called to take the gospel to an unreached people group. As they are preparing to leave for some intensive training in Mexico, I asked them what they’re hoping to learn. I wasn’t prepared for their answer, *“We want to learn to suffer well.”* Shortly after meeting with them, I read this quote from Kevin DeYoung: *“We do not pray for a life set free from suffering, we pray for a life set free from sinning.”*

The Apostle Paul modeled this in 1 Corinthians 15:31: ***“I die every day!”*** Seeing ourselves as crucified with Christ gives us power to live the Christian life according to Galatians 2:20: ***“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*** Galatians 5:24 says, ***“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”***

Some time ago, I came across this cartoon which made me smile...and then squirm.



"Well, I haven't actually *died* to sin, but I did feel kind of faint once."

In Galatians 6:14, Paul stated his crucifixion with Christ enabled him not to follow the ways of the world: ***“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”***

In preparation for this message, I read a sermon by Charles Spurgeon called, “A Procession of Cross-Bearers.” This was preached in 1875, 30 years before Edgewood began! It was so good I was tempted to preach it today. Instead, I want to give some of his encouragements as to why we should take up our cross.

- 1. You cannot be a disciple unless you take up your cross.**
- 2. Think of those who’ve come before you who have carried a heavier cross.** This would include noble martyrs and sufferers for Christ’s sake like those described in Hebrews 11:36-38: ***“Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was***

not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

3. **Contemplate the severe sufferings of our Savior.** Spurgeon quotes this statement, *“His way was much rougher and darker than mine; did Christ my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?”* Although tribulation is the path God’s children must take, they can take comfort in knowing their Master has traveled the way before them. More than that, they have His presence with them, His sympathy to encourage them, His grace to support them, and His example to teach them how to endure. 1 Peter 2:21: ***“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”***
4. **Grace will be given to help you bear your cross.**
5. **Cross-bearing will be a blessing.**
6. **Jesus is honored when you carry your cross.**
7. **In a short time, your cross will be exchanged for a crown.** There are no crown-wearers in Heaven who were not cross-bearers here below.

Taking up our cross is quite a condition for discipleship, isn’t it? Do you desire to be a disciple? Are you denying yourself? Have you died by taking up your cross?

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I conclude with the introduction to Spurgeon’s sermon:

“Your mind’s eye can see that procession yonder. Notice it carefully. At the head of it, there walks One whom we rightly call Master and Lord; you may know Him by the prints of the nails in His hands and feet. I observe that He carries a cross, and that it is a very heavy one. Do you see the long line following Him? They are all those of whom the world was not worthy. That line has been continued even to this day and will be continued until the present dispensation shall close. As you watch these different followers of Christ in the procession, one thing will strike you, — that, however much they differ in some respects, they are all alike in one thing, — every one of them, carries a cross. There is no exception to this rule; from the Master down to the last disciple, it is a procession of cross-bearers.”

It's our joy to join the procession with some fellow cross-bearers who recently left for ministry in Southeast Asia. They're living on mission as our newest Go Team partners. Listen to their story.

Video

Did you catch what she said? *"We had counted the cost but hadn't counted it all joy."* He echoed this sentiment when he declared, *"It's about giving up things we have a tight grip on...whatever difficulties come to us now and in the future, it's totally worth it."*

This reminds me of a recent VOM Radio podcast I listened to (BTW, we're hosting a virtual Voice of the Martyrs conference here on March 5 called, "Imprisoned for Christ"). The podcast featured believers in Cuba who are being persecuted. I was struck by their great joy in the midst of the difficulties. One pastor encouraged fellow pastors to preach a clear gospel, so when the government authorities are spying on their services, they might get saved!

Discipleship is difficult, but it's also a delight. Jesus went through a lot of pain but what He did for us is described as joy. Hebrews 12:2 says we're to look to ***"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."***

Communion

Let's transition now to communion as we focus on the joy set before Jesus as He became the sacrifice for our sins. He bore the cross for us and now we get the opportunity to bear our own cross. We're given some guidelines in 1 Corinthians 11.

1. Look up. *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord."* (11:27)

2. Look within. *"Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."* (11:28)

3. Look around. *“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”* (11:33)

Prayerful Contemplation

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

We practice open communion. You don’t need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

Directions for Opening Cup

1. Hold the cup with one hand and with the other find the clear tab and pull gently to open in order to take the bread: *Take bread*
2. Continue to hold the cup and now find the foil tab and pull carefully to open the juice cup. Be careful while pulling – you don’t have to pull it completely off: *Take juice*