

The Cross of Christ

Lesson 12: Living in Gratitude: Take Up Your Cross -- Luke 9:23-26

We have spent eleven lessons standing before the cross of Christ, tracing what his death accomplished and why. We have seen the love of God revealed there, our sin borne, the wrath turned aside, the debt cancelled, the powers disarmed, and the new covenant sealed in his blood. We have been brought inside that cross, crucified and raised with him in baptism, and we have gathered at his table to remember. Now, in this final lesson, comes the question every honest heart must ask after gazing so long at such a death: how then shall I live? What is the fitting response to a love like this? And Jesus himself gives the answer, and it is bracing. The proper response to his cross is that we take up our own.

If anyone would come after me, Jesus says, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Notice that word daily. The Christian life is not a single dramatic decision followed by years of coasting. It is a daily taking up of the cross, a daily dying to self, a daily following of the crucified Lord. Jesus then states the great paradox at the center of discipleship: whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. The way to truly live is to die, to lose our self-centered grip on our own lives and find real life in surrender to Christ. The cross, it turns out, is not only something Jesus carried for us; it is a pattern we are called to carry after him.

This is the truth that guards the whole study from becoming merely beautiful ideas we admire and then forget. Grace is free, but it is never cheap. The same blood that redeemed us lays a total claim upon us. We were bought with a price, and so we no longer belong to ourselves. To respond to the cross with anything less than a surrendered life would be to treat the death of the Son of God as a small thing. Paul captured the whole of it in one sentence: I have been crucified with Christ, and 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. That is the destination of this entire series, not just knowing about the cross, but a life so shaped by it that Christ himself lives in us.

So read these words of Jesus and let them complete the journey. This is not a grim call to joyless duty; it is the most freeing invitation in the world. The self we are told to deny is the very self that has been making us miserable, the grasping, anxious, self-protective self that can never get enough. To lose that life for Christ's sake is to find the life we were made for. The response to the cross is not first effort but gratitude, a gratitude so deep that it reorders everything, a gratitude that takes up its cross each morning and follows the One who took up his for us. He loved us and gave himself for us. The only fitting answer is to give ourselves wholly back to him.

Group Discussion: After eleven lessons on what Christ's cross accomplished for us, Jesus tells us to take up our own cross daily. Why do you think the fitting response to his sacrifice is a life of

self-denial and surrender rather than simply gratitude in word? What is the difference between admiring the cross and actually following the crucified Lord?

Personal Reflection: Jesus calls us to take up our cross “daily.” Where in your life is the call to deny yourself and follow Christ a daily, ongoing struggle rather than a settled, finished decision? What would it look like to take up your cross tomorrow morning?

Read Luke 9:23–26

Study Questions

1. Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (v. 23). What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross, and why does Jesus make this the basic shape of following him rather than an advanced or optional step?
2. Self-denial sounds harsh to modern ears, yet Jesus presents it as the way to life. What is the “self” he calls you to deny, and where is that self most loudly asserting itself in your life right now?
3. Jesus emphasizes taking up the cross “daily.” Why is discipleship a daily, ongoing surrender rather than a one-time decision, and what does this tell us about the nature of the Christian life as a lifelong walk of faithfulness?
4. Be honest about where you are tempted to treat your commitment to Christ as a finished transaction rather than a daily walk. What would change if you approached tomorrow as a fresh day to take up your cross and follow him?

5. Jesus states the great paradox: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (v. 24). How does losing our life for Christ's sake turn out to be the way we truly find it, and why does clutching our own life end in losing it?
6. Where are you currently trying to "save" your life, holding tightly to comfort, control, reputation, or security, in a way that may actually be costing you the fuller life Christ offers? What would it mean to loosen that grip this week?
7. Jesus warns, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (v. 25). How does this question expose the emptiness of a life spent gaining things while losing oneself, and how does the cross reorder what we count as gain and loss?
8. Jesus speaks of not being "ashamed" of him and his words (v. 26). Where are you most tempted to be ashamed of Christ, to stay quiet or blend in, and how does gratitude for his cross give you courage to confess him before others?
9. Bringing the passage together with Paul's words, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), explain how the proper response to the cross is daily cross-bearing discipleship and crucified-with-Christ living, a transformed gratitude expressed in a faithful life. Why does this stand against both cheap grace, which receives forgiveness without surrender, and the presumption of "once saved, always saved," which treats salvation as secure apart from continued faithfulness? How do we hold together the freeness of grace and the call to remain faithful to the end?

10. Look back across this entire study of the cross of Christ, from the heart of God to the call to take up your own cross. Name one specific way the cross has changed you over these twelve lessons, and one concrete commitment you will make to follow the crucified Lord in grateful, daily faithfulness.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; Romans 12:1, present your bodies as a living sacrifice in view of God's mercies; Mark 8:34-38, the parallel call to take up the cross and follow; Galatians 5:24, those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh; Hebrews 12:1-3, run with endurance, looking to Jesus who endured the cross.