

**D-Up: A Series on Discipleship**  
**Discipleship is Not a Class**  
**Luke 9:23-25**

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**Text Introduction:** This morning I am continuing our series on discipleship. We are calling this series of messages “D-Up!” The “D” stands for discipleship.

We have focused on our initial decision to follow Christ, on baptism and the importance of the church to help us grow as disciples. We next focused on daily reading of the Word, prayer, stewardship, and sharing our faith.

In the last three weeks, we have talked about outcomes of discipleship. We have talked about disciples keeping God’s commands, loving one another, and serving one another. That list of outcomes, one might conclude, includes many other things, so last week we looked at a summary type passage that calls us to a life of discipleship.

I conclude this morning with this simple thought. On the basis of what we have examined over these many weeks together, here is the conclusion to discipleship. Discipleship is not a class; discipleship is a relationship. That doesn’t mean that there are not some things to be learned (perhaps in a small group of fellow disciples), but that is only the beginning.

Here is the text.

**Text:** Then He said to them all, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it. <sup>25</sup>What is a man benefited if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?

**Introduction:** I want you to imagine with me today that in one hand is everything you think you want that is in no way pleasing to Christ. Maybe to summarize, you can think of it as I read Chuck Swindoll put it in terms of 4 target areas of sin—possessions, power, popularity, and pleasure. Then, in the other hand, I want you to imagine all that comes with knowing Christ Jesus and following Christ Jesus as Lord.

Such is the way that Jesus Christ put the decision to all listening as described in our text today. I have six phrases that I want to share with you today to put this decision in some perspective.

**Individual Invitation**

“Then He said to them *all*. If *anyone...*” Anyone is invited, but everyone who chooses must accept the terms of discipleship which is to follow. This is not just a ticket to heaven, it is following Him.

This is not radical Christianity; this is regular Christianity!

Now, perhaps there is something interesting going on in the background to the call of discipleship. I have read everything I could get my hands on this week about something I heard a few months ago about the rabbinical schools of Jesus' day. Though the details are more sketchy and debated than I want them to be, I feel comfortable in telling you today that this relationship of teacher and disciple is rooted in the Jewish rabbi/pupil model to some degree. You see, in Jesus' world, some Jewish boys who excelled in school, at about 15 years old, would seek after a rabbi to continue their education. The young men sought out the rabbis, hoping to convince them of their memorization of the Torah and ability to become rabbis themselves. Every young "would-be" disciple of a rabbi would long to hear the rabbi say, "Come follow me."

The arrangement with Jesus' calling of His disciples is different isn't it? Jesus sought them. What do we learn from this? Jesus seeks us. He is inviting us to be His disciples—His followers.

### **Drastic Devotion**

I understand Jesus' three-fold command to be synonymous commands to follow Jesus. Jesus denied Himself. Remember in the Garden of Gethesemane, He prayed "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from Me—nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done." On another occasion, Jesus told the disciples, "I have not come to be served, but to serve."

We know that Jesus took up His cross. These are commands that leave us with the basic notion of what it means to be His disciple—to follow Him.

Paul said, as is recorded in Romans 8:29, that we are "to be conformed to the image of Jesus." So that is the root of all that Jesus is saying here as is recorded here in Luke 9:23.

The Gurkhas were a military group from Nepal. In a 1964 war between Indonesia and Malaysia the Gurkhas were approached by the Brits to jump from transport planes against the Indonesians. At first the Gurkhas rejected the idea, but the next day they sought the British officers out. They explained that they would jump under certain provisions.

1. Jump onto soft ground
2. Fly slow over the jump zone
3. Fly only 100 feet high

The reply from the British officers was "No problem on the first two requests. Of Course, that is always the plan." However, "No way on the third request; the parachutes won't open."

"Parachutes? No one said anything about parachutes. We'll jump with parachutes into anything from anywhere!"

This is total surrender. This is obedience in every area. This is following Him in anything, anywhere, and any time.

## **Definitive Direction**

“Come follow me” is the command. There is a definitive direction. We follow Him. And where did that ultimately lead? To the cross. That doesn’t mean that we have to die to be His disciples, but it does mean that we have to be willing to die.

## **Daily Decision**

We determine once-and-for-all to follow Jesus, but there is a daily decision to die to self and seek His kingdom. Somebody said, “The problem with a living sacrifice is that we can too easily get off of the altar. I have to deny myself every day. I have to take up my cross and be willing to sacrifice every day. I have to follow Him every day.

## **Competing Conclusion**

Verses 24 and 25 give us an irony. When you serve self, you end up losing. When you submit to God, you end up gaining what you thought you were giving up. When you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus, you gain more than you lose.

That’s why the great missionary Jim Eliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Douglas Southall Freeman, the Pulitzer Prize winning biographer of General Robert E. Lee, tells a couple of interesting stories about Lee and his commitment to denial of self. For example, Lee released his slaves two years before Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation saying that he “wanted people to know he was fighting for Virginia, not for slavery.”

The other story is that of a young mother in North Virginia asking Lee to voice a blessing over her infant son. Lee said, “Teach him to deny himself. That is all.” (From sermon by J. Ligon Duncan, FPC, Jackson MS, February 7, 2010)

## **Crucial Question**

You see the question in verse 25. Does it make sense to gain the whole world, yet forfeit yourself? Does it make sense to follow the world for the time that is appearing like vapor in this life and reject Christ for eternity? This is the crucial question.

Remember our two hands?

Douglas McMillan was a great evangelist in England. He died in 1991. He was led to faith in Christ by a man named David Patterson. David explained to Douglas the Gospel, a Gospel that he had already heard many times before, but this time was different. Douglas’ heart was moved. He said, "Are you telling me it’s as easy as that. That I embrace Christ and He receives me because of the work that He has done on the cross?"

And David said to him, "Yes, Douglas, that’s true."

And he said, "But wait a minute. I’m going to have to change the way I live, aren’t I. I can’t go on living the way I’ve been living. Isn’t that right?"

David said, "Yes, that's true Douglas."

There was a long silence. David then held out two hands to Douglas. "Douglas, in this hand, I'll give you everything you think you're going to have to give up if you become a Christian, and in this hand I'll give you Christ. Which is it going to be?"

For ten minutes there was total silence. David Patterson later on said that it seemed like hours. Finally Douglas said, "I'll take Christ. I'll take Christ." (From sermon by J. Ligon Duncan, FPC, Jackson MS, March 16, 1997.)

What about you? Will you take Christ, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him? Or will you continue to hang on to the things that you are going to lose one day anyway?