

BE: Be a Disciple
Luke 9:23-25

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Text Introduction: In our ONE Day service (on August 31) and beyond, I will issue the challenge to “Do Something” for God that you have never done. At the same time that we ask this question, we will ask God as a church collectively to unify us around one thing that we can do together that we have never done before in the history of our church.

I sense that this could be a very exciting time for us as a church. I believe that this is the kind of challenge that will help us to grow as Jesus’ disciples and help us to grow in our relationships with one another. However, I want to make something clear. We cannot do something just to do something. We could be so busy doing things that we forget that Jesus calls us to a relationship of being. So, I am using these Sundays leading up to our ONE Day celebration thinking about who we are to be. As we have said, “Being Precedes Doing!” Last time we talked about “Being Holy!” This morning I want to talk specifically about one thing that God commands us to be—a disciple!

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. ²⁴For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will save it. ²⁵What is a man benefited if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?

Introduction: Kyle Idleman is the pastor of Southeast Bible Church in Louisville, KY. In 2011, Idleman wrote a book titled, *Not a Fan*. Idleman’s thesis is a simple, yet important one. He used this text before us today to remind us that Jesus did not call us to be His “fans,” but to be His followers.

In the opening pages, he writes about preparing for his Easter message one year. Their church is a large one. He was expecting some 30,000 people to be in attendance on Easter morning. He writes:

Finally a thought crosses my mind: I wonder what Jesus taught whenever he had the big crowds. What I discovered would change me forever. Not just as a preacher, but as a follower of Christ. I found that when Jesus had a large crowd, he would often preach a message that was likely to cause them to leave. (Idleman, *Not a Fan*, p. 11)

I want us to look at one of those hard messages this morning. Most preachers and commentators on this Scripture see three distinct imperatives in verse 23. However, I think it is more faithful to this text to understand that Jesus isn’t saying three things here, but He is saying one thing—Follow Me! So, instead of three points, I have 5 sentences that I want to give you today. Each sentence builds upon the previous one. I think it is the interpretation that is most faithful to this text.

The call of Jesus is a call to follow Him.

Again, 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 call of Jesus to follow Him is a call to everyone.

“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!

The call of Jesus for everyone to follow Him regards everything.

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

The Old Testament story of Elisha points out what this means. We read about it in 1 Kings 19. God tells Elijah that Elisha is to be his successor as the prophet to the people. When Elijah finds Elisha, Elisha is plowing with 12 teams of oxen. Some say that this is a description of Elisha’s incredible wealth. He had much to turn away from in order to be God’s anointed prophet. So what does he do? The Bible says that he slaughters the oxen, puts the meat on the wooden plow and yoke, burning them, cooking all of the meat to serve to all the people. He then followed Elijah. It was a symbolic act that Elisha was leaving everything. This is why Jesus a little later in Luke 9 says, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The call of Jesus for everyone to follow Him in everything is a 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.”

The call for everyone to follow Jesus in everything, everyday carries a tremendous irony.

Verses 24 and 25 give us this 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.

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.”

William Borden was the son of the famous Borden family—wealthy family of the Borden Dairy fame. By the time young William graduated from high school in 1904, he was already a millionaire. For his graduation, his family gave him a trip around the world. While on that trip, Borden became burdened for the nations of the world. He wrote back to his family in a letter, “I’m going to give my life to prepare for the mission field.” As he made that commitment, he wrote in the cover of his Bible, “**No Reserves!**” He went off to Yale University. As a freshman, he began meeting with another student for early prayer and Bible Study. That group of 2 became 3 and then 4. Before the end of his freshman year, 125 persons were meeting together for prayer and Bible study. By the time he graduated from Yale, 1,000 of Yale’s 1,300 students were coming to his Bible Study. As he graduated from Yale and went off to Princeton Seminary, he wrote in his Bible under No Reserves, “**No Retreat!**” After Seminary, Borden headed to Egypt to study Arabic because his calling was to reach the Muslims of the world. Shortly after reaching

Egypt, Borden contracted spinal meningitis and was dead in one month. When his family received his belongings, in his Bible, before he died, he had written under No Reserves, No Retreat, "**No Regrets!**"¹

¹ www.thetask.org/thetask/heroes/Aug 03