

Finders Weepers Losers Keepers

Ignorance and Insight: Part 11
Mark 8:34-38 (Mt.16:13-27, Lk.9:18-26) 6/8/2018

This message will help you understand what it means to deny yourself, take up your cross, and lose your life, and will provide practical instruction on how doing those things can help you in your daily battle against sin.

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Mark 8:27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" **28** They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." **29** "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." **30** Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would follow me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever wants to save his life will

lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his life? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his life?

38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Introduction: The Things of Men

We left off last time with Jesus and the disciples as far from Jerusalem as they ever travelled—way up north in Caesarea Philippi. And the disciples standing in what must have been stunned silence. Jesus had just call Peter Satan. The jihadist Muslims routinely refer to America as the Great Satan. I don't worry too much about that because I don't care about their opinion. But what if Jesus Christ called *you* the great Satan? What sin did Peter commit that was so bad that it provoked Jesus to call him Satan? It was a sin that most people wouldn't think is that big a deal. Peter was guilty of having in mind the things of men.

33 ... "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Most people, when they think of the really bad sins—the ones you'd have to be satanic to commit or that would make you deserve eternal torment in hell, they think of things like mass murder or rape or something like that. But here we see all it takes for you to be satanic in Jesus' eyes is for you to do the most natural thing in the world—just have in mind the things of men. Having in mind the things of men seems innocuous. It's like natural gas—a colorless, odorless element that is lethal.

So what about you? Do you have in mind the things of men?

We are right at the climactic center point of the book of Mark where Peter gets an A+ on Mark part 1 (Who is Jesus?). Peter says, "You are the Christ." But then he gets an F on part 2 of Mark (What did Jesus come to do?).¹ In fact, I think we could call it an F minus because Jesus gives him the correct answer up front and Peter still gets it wrong. How can you still get it dead wrong when the teacher tells you the right answer? It was because he couldn't accept the right answer because he had in mind **the things of men**. So what are **the things of men**? And what does it mean to have them **in mind**?

Attitude

I'll start with the second question. The phrase translated to **have in mind** is *phroneo*, which is a word that refers to attitude. It's the same word in Philippians 2:5 where it says: **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus**. So having in mind the things of men means to have the attitude of men. Attitude involves not only how you think but also how you feel about those thoughts and your whole perspective and way of looking at things. It's the glasses you put on that color everything you see. That's what attitude is. And Jesus says if you have the natural, human attitude about life, you might as well be the devil.

¹ This is frequently the case with people who are strong on systematic theology but weak on practical theology. They can become prideful in their mastery of systematics but their knowledge does not prepare them for handling suffering.

Human Thinking

Satan is a liar. His goal is to get you to think and feel differently from how God thinks and feels. And that's easy for him because of our nature.

Isaiah 55:8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

So if you don't want to be on team Satan, you have to transcend human thinking. Your attitude has to be superhuman—especially your attitude about suffering. That's where Peter went wrong. Jesus said, **"The son of man must suffer"** and Peter said, "No." That was his attitude.

Follow Means Follow

Now you might hear that and say, "I'm okay with the idea that Jesus had to suffer and die. I don't have a problem with that, so I'm in the clear, right?" Not so fast. Look what Jesus does next.

34 ... "If anyone would follow me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

So this superhuman attitude isn't just about Jesus' suffering; it's also about our own suffering.² Normally the Bible says the requirement for becoming a Christian is to believe. But instead of just using the word, "believe," he's going to flesh out what faith in him looks like in practical terms. And what it looks like is having a superhuman attitude not only about Jesus' suffering, but about your undergoing the same suffering. That's what following means. Jesus repeats the word "follow" twice.

34 ... "If anyone would follow³ me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

He's saying, "Following means following. If you want to be my follower, then you have to go down the same road I'm going down—the road of rejection, suffering, and death."

Down With Self

Deny Yourself

And to do that, he says, you'll have to **deny yourself**. That's a strong phrase. It's not talking about giving up French fries for Lent. It's not about giving up a pleasure; it's about giving up yourself altogether. It means you have to do something God can't do.

2 Timothy 2:13 ... [God] cannot deny himself.

² The human attitude toward suffering was illustrated just this week in a new study that came out claiming that single, childless women are happier than married women. As you read the report you find out how this researcher came to that conclusion. He did it by asking women about hardships in their lives. Women with children and husbands reported a lot more hardship. And this guy concluded that if they have more hardships, they must be miserable. Therefore single women are happier. If he applied that same logic, he would conclude that friendless people are also happier than people with close friends. Of course people in love relationships have more hardships. Nothing brings more pain into your life than the people you love. That's just what it's like to love sinful people in a fallen world—they hurt you. Nothing brings you more pain than the people you love, but nothing brings you more joy either. Even most unbelievers can figure that much out, which is why most people get married. They already have the "bliss" of singleness and are eager to forfeit it for the hardships of marriage because the joy that comes along with it is worth the suffering. That is a microcosm of what Jesus is saying here. Just as a single person embraces some suffering for greater joy and fulfillment in marriage, so a Christian embraces suffering throughout this life for greater joy and fulfillment in eternity.

That's a perfect illustration of the human attitude: happiness = less suffering. Therefore, avoid suffering. That's the human attitude; that's the life we must reject.

³ The NIV says "come after" but it's the same word translated "follow" at the end of the verse.

What does that mean? It means God can't reject his own nature. God can't, but we must. We must utterly reject what comes most naturally to us—operating according to human nature where the most important person in my life is me. We have to reject that. So we could title this passage: “Down with Self.”

If I want to be a Christian, it can't happen unless I renounce Darrell Richard Ferguson as the predominant figure in my life. That means renouncing my agendas and priorities and hopes and dreams and plans, and unconditionally adopting the agendas and priorities of Jesus Christ. Followers of Jesus must walk through life saying what Jesus said in the garden—not my will, but your will. Being a follower of Jesus costs you your life—your life is no longer at your disposal; it's at God's disposal.

Take Up Your Cross

Then Jesus ratchets up the rhetoric even more.

34 ... "If anyone would follow me, he must deny himself and take up his cross

Jesus hadn't revealed yet that he would die on a cross, so at this point the cross had nothing to do with Jesus or religion.⁴ At the time Jesus said this, the cross meant one thing: a way of torturing people to death. The person was stripped naked, utterly humiliated, brutalized, and would die a slow, agonizing, obscene death. It was so obscene that people back then wouldn't even say the word, “cross” in polite company—the word itself was too vulgar to use. And Jesus picks that word to describe the Christian life. When a man was crucified, he had to carry the cross beam to the place of his execution. Jesus says, “That's what it's like to be one of my followers. It's one, long, brutal death march.”

The Bad Life

So is Jesus saying every Christian will lose his life? That's exactly what he's saying.

35 For⁵ whoever wants to save his life will lose it.⁶ But whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.

Down with self! Deny yourself, take the death march toward crucifixion, and instead of saving your life, lose it for Christ⁷.

Does that mean literal, physical death? No, because after you take up your cross you continue to follow him, so you're still breathing.⁸

34 ... he must take up his cross and follow me.⁹

So if it's not physical death, in what way do you lose your life?

⁴ Jesus doesn't reveal that until v.15. Jesus indicated he would be rejected by the Jewish authorities and be killed, but the Jews did not crucify people.

⁵ Verses 35,36,37, and 38 each begin with the word “for” (Gr. *gar*) in the Greek. So they are all explanatory.

⁶ Jesus states this in the form of a paradox to force us to think deeply about it.

⁷ The “for Christ” part is important. Verse 35 says, “... **whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.**” It's not suffering and denial just for the sake of asceticism or self-punishment. He's only talking about the suffering that results from following Christ. In 4:38 Jesus was asleep on a cushion. Why did he sleep on a cushion? If suffering is so great, why didn't he rest his head on a sharp corner of a board somewhere? Did he use that pillow because it was necessary for gospel purposes? No, he just wanted to be comfortable. Jesus was seeking comfort in this world. Why was it okay for him to do that? Didn't that violate this passage? No, because this passage is speaking only of the suffering that comes as a result of doing God's will. It's fine to enjoy a comfortable bed. The question is, what will you do when you realize Jesus is calling you to the mission field where you won't have a comfortable bed? Will you be deaf to his call because you can't sacrifice comfort? If so, you forfeit eternal life. It's not about seeking out discomfort. It's about renouncing any comfort that stands between you and God's will.

⁸ In Luke's account it says you have to take up your cross *daily*.

⁹ The verbs “deny” and “take up” are aorist and “follow” is present.

1) Seeking this World's Treasure

There are two parts. One has to do with making gains in this world.

36 For¹⁰ what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his life¹¹?

A big part of life in this world is running after the things of value in this world. Money, clothes, cars, a house, education, a great job, good health, fun recreation, excitement, entertainment, marriage, kids, friends—everything that has value in this world. It's the stuff that every normal person lives for—the Christ follower has to let go of it all.

2) Saving Life = Seeking the World's Honor

That's one part—going after this world's stuff. The other part is about this world's respect.

38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous¹² and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes.¹³

Part of life in this world is avoiding shame. When we are around people who hate Jesus or mock his word, we're tempted to keep our association with Jesus on the down low, because everyone wants to be thought well of and not laughed at. We want honor, not humiliation. That's why you fix your hair when it's sticking up, that's why you are horrified if you find out your fly was down during the whole party, it's why you try not to say anything stupid. We go out of our way to avoid dishonor in the eyes of people, including total strangers. But if you're not willing to be disgraced and humiliated for Christ, you can't be a Christian.

Hebrews 13:13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.¹⁴

His Word

And Jesus is careful to include his words.

38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words Same thing back in v.35.¹⁵

35 ... whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

You cannot separate Jesus and his words—reject his words and you've rejected him. That's not true of anyone else. You can be my friend and not agree with my words. I've had friends who believe in evolution, friends who disagree with my political opinions. I've even had friends who believe it's ok to

¹⁰ In the Greek, every sentence in this whole paragraph begins with the word “for.” So each sentence is giving further explanation of what preceded.

¹¹ The NIV says “soul,” but it's the same word for “life” as in the previous verse.

¹² Calling the generation adulterous does not mean they were sexually promiscuous. Jesus is using the language of the Old Testament prophets who accused Israel of committing adultery against God when they worshipped idols (cf. Isaiah 1:4, 21, Ezekiel 16:32, Hosea 2:4). Throughout OT history, there were some points where the whole generation of Jewish people at that time had fallen into idolatry. But that wasn't the case in Jesus' generation. It wasn't like they were worshipping Baal or some a golden calf like past generations. But Jesus uses the same language to refer to his generation, because they were every bit as unfaithful to God. Reject Jesus and you might as well be prostrate before a pagan statue somewhere.

¹³ This would have been an ominous things for the disciples to hear. He's letting them know that future events are going to be such that they will be tempted to be ashamed to even associate with Jesus.

¹⁴ The very fact that this is an issue would be alarming to the disciples. Why would there ever be a problem with people being ashamed of a glorious, powerful, conquering king who rules the world? Jesus is driving home the fact even further that he is going to be rejected, not just by some wacko minority fringe, but by the power brokers and authorities and the majority. And association with him will bring shame.

¹⁵ These words do not appear in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke. Mark typically summarizes Jesus' words, giving less detail than the other gospels. So the fact that these words are included shows Mark regarded them as especially important.

make brownies or chocolate chip cookies without any nuts. Those are all examples of people who reject my opinions and yet still accept me as a person. You can do that with Darrell Ferguson; you can't do it with Jesus Christ. You can do that with me because I'm wrong about some things. But Jesus isn't. If you believe in a Jesus who is sometimes wrong, that version of Jesus is (as a friend of mine used to say) a fig newton of your imagination. Jesus' words are the Word of God that perfectly reflect his nature, and so if you reject them you reject him.

It's important that Jesus make this point about his words because there are a lot of people who have a sentimental fondness for the man Jesus as they imagine him. But when they are confronted with his teachings, it's a different story. That's the thing about Jesus the world really hates—his words. Just look at the beginning of Acts. What did the authorities tell the Apostles? Did they say, "You must stop healing people in Jesus' name"? No. Stop caring for the poor? No. Stop worshipping and singing praise songs and having fellowship? No, all that was fine.

Acts 4:17 ... [the Jewish authorities] commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

You can believe in Jesus, you can worship Jesus—just don't propagate Jesus' words. So how did they respond?

Acts 4:20 We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Why not? Because it's not optional for a Christian. Jesus was clear. Shut your mouth about the gospel and you deny Jesus himself.

The Apostles refused to be quiet even when threatened with humiliation, flogging, imprisonment, and death. And yet what do we do? So often we *volunteer* to be quiet. We'll shut up about the gospel and they don't even have to threaten us. Why? Because respect from the world seems to us like life.

Securing things of value and seeking honor and respect in this world—Jesus says, "If you want to be one of my followers, that's the life you have to lose."

Jesus' Altar Call

Have you ever heard an altar call like this? Usually in an invitation the pastor stands up there and begs anyone to come forward. Sometimes they even try to trick them into coming forward by being vague about what it means. And they'll make it real easy: "Every head bowed and every eye closed..." What is that? "Don't worry, no one has to know. No embarrassment, no discomfort, it won't cost you anything. The whole thing can happen under the table so even if you're ashamed to be associated with Jesus in a building where everyone worships him, that's fine. It'll be our secret."

Can you imagine Jesus at a modern altar call? A bunch of hands go up. Jesus frowns and says, "It will cost you your life." Several go back down. "If you're not willing to be tortured to death for me, put your hand down." One hand is left. "Every head up, every eye open, that man right there is associating himself with me."

Easy Believism

There's no bigger oxymoron in the English language than the phrase "casual Christianity." That is an absolute contradiction in terms. You are a radical, fundamentalist, extremist Christian or you are a non-Christian. But unlike the radical, extremist Muslims, instead of killing people for their religion, Christians lay down their own lives.¹⁶ So it's a different kind of extremism, but make no mistake:

¹⁶ Our culture bristles at the terms, "radical, fundamentalist, extremist" when it's connected to religion. But they are fine with radical, fundamentalist, extremism in any other area—sports, hobbies, music, science, etc. It's only in relationship to religion that there is a stigma attached to full commitment to the fundamentals.

Christianity is extreme by definition. There has always been an “easy believism” version of the gospel. This is the Jesus who accepts you just the way you are and makes no demands for change. It’s a “gospel” about a God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom without cost by faith without works to a life without holiness. And it’s a false gospel—fake Christianity. Jesus demanded everything from his followers. It doesn’t take much of a man to be a Christian, but it does take all of him.

Sometimes Christians will tell an unbeliever, “You might as well become a Christian even if you’re not sure, because if you reject Christ and you turn out to be wrong, the consequence is eternal hell. But if you live your life for Christ and it turns out Christianity isn’t true, you haven’t lost much because the Christian life is so wonderful. Not true. In 1 Corinthians 15:19 Paul said a person would have to be out of his mind to subject himself to the suffering and disgrace of the Christian life if there’s no resurrection.

- The suffering of persecution
 - The suffering of abstaining from sinful pleasures
 - The suffering of repentance when you do sin
 - The suffering of being out of step with the world
 - The suffering that comes along with serving in God’s kingdom and the hard things he calls us to do
 - The suffering of feeling the way God feels, grieving over evil in the world
 - And the suffering of denying yourself and giving up your whole life.
- If Jesus doesn’t return, you’ve lost everything.

White Knuckling Life

The idea of carrying your cross has become so watered down in our day. Sometimes a person will be in a hard relationship and say, “We all have our cross to bear,” as if dealing with the normal hardships of life were the same thing as crucifying self for Christ. It’s ironic because many times the people who think they are carrying their cross are doing the opposite. Someone has a hard marriage and thinks he’s bearing a cross, but in reality, he hasn’t let go of his life at all. He’s white-knuckling his life. He has such a tight death grip on it—he has an idea of what would be best for him and he squirms and thrashes against anything that threatens it. That’s exactly what Jesus says we have to let go of. Let go of your own ideas of what’s best for you, your own comfort, your dignity, your honor, and your very life for Jesus and his words. Down with self!

Up with Life

Motive: Real Life

Why? What’s the goal of all this self-denial?

35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

There’s the goal. Why do you have to throw your life away? Because it’s the only way to save it. It’s all for your benefit.

That’s surprising. Usually if you are asked to sacrifice your own life it’s for the greater good. Or maybe for the glory of Christ. Or to save your brother’s life. Those motives are given elsewhere in Scripture, but here the motive is to save your life. It turns out the Christian life isn’t a death march; it’s a life march. It starts with death but ends in life.

The Christian life is not a life of setting aside your own self-interests. It’s a life of serving your own self-interests. You should always just do whatever is best for you—always. But here’s the guideline: You can seek what’s best for you all you want, as long as you’re seeking what God says is best for you, not what you think is best for you. Your own ideas of what’s best are the old life. Those ideas are what need to get nailed to a cross and brutally executed. That’s the difference between the human attitude and

the superhuman attitude. The human attitude insists on seeking that which seems to me to be best. The superhuman attitude seeks that which God says is best even if it's the opposite of what seems good to me (and it usually is opposite because God's best so often involves a whole lot of suffering). But it's suffering that leads right through the valley of the shadow of death into glorious new green pastures of life.

So let's change the title. Instead of "Down with Self," a better title for this passage would be, "Up with Life!" Lose your life now to save it later. The human attitude is "finder's keepers losers weepers." But Jesus said, "No, finders weepers losers keepers." Lose your life in this world and you keep real life.

The Good Kind of Life Saving

And what is real life? Real life is the eternal version of the worthless life you give up in this world. Look again at v.38. If you hold on to honor in this world, Jesus will disown you on Judgment Day.¹⁷ But what does that imply about people who let go of this world's honor and are *not* ashamed of Jesus and his words? Jesus will acknowledge them on Judgment Day when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

The bad life and the good life both have the same components: stuff and honor. The bad life that you are to nail to the cross is living for the stuff and honor of this world. The good life that you are to save is seeking the stuff and honor that Jesus offers when he returns.

And the emphasis here is on the honor—that "well done good and faithful servant" we all long for. In front of countless millions of angels, the Lord Jesus Christ will draw you alongside himself and bestow on you the greatest conceivable honor—greater honor than any creature has ever received on any occasion in the history of the world.

If your friends start talking about some celebrity or famous person, and you happen to know that person—it's a friend or someone you went to school with or you just met him once, you'll mention it, right? Why do famous people spend so much time signing autographs? It's because we all long for the honor that comes from being connected to greatness—even if it's a very weak connection.

On the day Jesus comes with all the angels, you will be directly and personally connected to greatness and everyone will see Jesus put his hand on your shoulder. Every desire you've ever had to be respected or treated well or listened to; every time you've wanted to be liked or well thought of; every time you were miserable because you made a fool of yourself or were embarrassed or looked down on—the appetite God planted in every human being for honor will be fulfilled in the most wonderful, satisfying way forever.

We all crave honor. The only question is, honor from whom? Do you want it from this adulterous and sinful generation, or from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ?

John 12:43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

That's the natural human attitude. But we're different.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 We were not looking for praise from men.

If you don't care about human honor but run hard after honor from God, that will save your life.

Romans 2:7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

¹⁷ The language is taken from Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is given authority to judge the nations and rule and be worshipped forever. Some have suggested that the "coming" in v.38 is a reference to 70 A.D. But that does not fit the reference to Daniel 7. In that chapter, there is a dream about 4 successive beasts and then the Son of Man appearing and being given eternal authority. Then Daniel asks for the interpretation. He is told about 4 successive kingdoms that will oppose the people of God, and then the interpretation of the Son of Man portion of the dream, which is the point where the enemies of God's people are finally defeated and power is taken from them. That could hardly describe 70 A.D., where Israel's enemies annihilated Israel.

Lose your life in order to save it means everything you give up in this life—honor, money, possessions, comfort—everything you lose in this life, you will gain in eternity.

Not Extreme

So what sounded extreme a minute ago isn't really all that extreme, is it? Is Jesus asking a lot when he says, "Give up death in exchange for life?" The only self you are called to deny is the deranged, suicidal self that would prefer garbage to glory and cost you your eternal soul in the process. The self that gets hurt and tries to comfort itself by guzzling life-promising, life-destroying poison.

Have you noticed how unapologetic Jesus is when he makes demands like this? In ch.10 Peter's going to tell Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you," which was true. How does Jesus respond? Did he say, "Oh, I'm so sorry you had to suffer such a loss. Are you okay?" No, basically he said, "You're welcome." He told them, "You're going to receive 100 times what you gave up now, and eternal life later. You haven't lost anything." There are no martyrs in the kingdom of God.

When Jesus says, "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it," all he's really saying is, "Anyone who wants to remain in the dining room of the Titanic will drown." Is it a sacrifice to give up your plush, comfortable, warm, dry stateroom and jump over the side into a freezing cold, unsheltered, rough, wooden lifeboat? Not when the ship is sinking.

That thing that is so hard for you to give up for Christ—it's like you're holding a gun to your own head and Jesus says, "I'll give you a bunch of wonderful gifts, but first you have to drop the gun." Is that a sacrifice?

This passage is often titled The Cost of Discipleship. But you could just as well title it The Cost of Non-Discipleship. Jesus wants you to compare the two. This passage is a P&L—profit and loss statement. These are all accounting terms—saving, loss, gain, forfeit, give, exchange. It's a side-by-side comparison of two portfolios. Two lives and you can't save both. You have to forfeit one to save the other, so compare the values.

On the earthly side, even if you run the table and get it all—you **gain the whole world** (v.36). You have all the money that exists, you own all the land, all the buildings, have all the friends, all the power, perfect health, everything.

36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his life¹⁸?

There was a skit in the Jack Benny show where a mugger accosted Jack Benny and said, "Your money or your life!" Benny didn't respond, so the guy repeated it: "Your money or your life!" Benny said, "I'm thinking." The reason that's funny is because it's not a hard question—what good is your wallet if you're dead?

Proverbs 11:4 Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath.

37 For what can a man give in exchange for his life?

Are you going to try to purchase your life back with the very thing that destroyed it?

Psalm 49:7 No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him-- 8 the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.

Fighting Sin with a Superhuman Attitude on Suffering

So let's close with this: How can we get this superhuman attitude about suffering for Christ and use it in our daily battle against sin? Let me give you three practical suggestions.

¹⁸ The NIV translates this word *soul*, but it's the same word translated *life* earlier in the passage.

1) Consider Satan's Will for Your Life

First, consider Satan's will for your life. Remember what Jesus told Peter—the human attitude toward suffering is satanic. What is Satan's will for your life? It's the same for you as it was for Jesus—avoidance of suffering. Just as he tried his hardest to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross, Satan's will for you is comfort, pleasure, and enjoyment of this world—no suffering. You know when you watch a movie and the villain is trying to persuade someone of something and you're yelling at the screen—“Don't listen to him! Don't fall for it!!” Say that to yourself. If Satan can get you to the point where avoidance of suffering is the priority in your life, he can lead you around by the nose wherever he wants you to go.

Don't listen to him, and don't be his voice in other people's lives either. We've all had those times when someone we really love is facing a situation where doing the right thing is going to be painful. Doing God's will is going to really cost them a lot, and our temptation is to tell them it's okay to take the easy way out. When we do that, if they're smart, they will look us in the eye and say, “Get behind me Satan.”

So this week, try to remind yourself once a day what Satan wants for you so you can resist his will for your life that day.

2) Keep the Big Picture in Mind

Secondly, keep the big picture in mind. Think more about eternity. Imagine you had a dream where you found yourself facing a group of thugs. Suddenly a signal sounds and they all rush at you and smash you to the ground. You don't understand what's going on because you can only see about a 5-foot radius around you. You get back to your feet and it happens again. It happens over and over until you figure out that if you turn and run when the signal sounds, they'll let you go.

One day you see it happen to another person. You help him up and explain to him, “You need to run away.” But he doesn't listen. He charges right at those men and gets hammered, time after time.

Finally you ask him, “Why do you keep doing that? Do you have a death wish?” And he says, “I used to be like you, but then I looked around.” And right then your eyes are opened and you can see you are an NFL football player in the middle of the Superbowl. There are only seconds left in the game, your team is down by 4, the ball is snapped and they hand it to you. The guy you were talking to once again throws his body in front of a linebacker and opens up a hole for you. Now there are just two players on the other team that stand between you and winning the Superbowl. They are big guys. This is going to be a massive collision, but if you can make it through, it's wide open to the end zone. So you lower your shoulder and grit your teeth and ram into them as hard as you can. You know you'll have major bruises tomorrow, but you don't care. You blast through, dance into the end zone, win the Superbowl, and it's the happiest you've ever been.

You can happily choose suffering when you see the big picture. And what is the big picture that will help you have that superhuman attitude about suffering for Christ? What's the big superbowl victory? It's the life Jesus promises if you give up this life—eternal honor and possessions. That's the end zone that gives us the motivation to lower our shoulder and plow right through whatever suffering we have to plow through to follow Christ.

You've got a purpose in life—a big one. And when it doesn't feel that way, remind yourself that's just because you're only looking at the little 5-ft radius of this world. Expand your vision to eternity. Pick one thing that you notice every day (the mountains, a certain billboard, a building), and use that thing as a memory cue to remind you to shift your focus from the little picture to the big picture.

3) Learn to Say “Necessary”

Learn the word “necessary.” When Jesus first brought up the topic of his suffering, Peter responded with the human attitude, which says “no” to suffering.¹⁹ Endure the pain of giving up the satisfaction of getting revenge or holding a grudge? No. Endure the pain of losing the money I can get if I cut a few corners? No. Endure the pain of giving missing out on a lustful look? No. Endure the pain of declining that dessert that I know God doesn’t want me to have? No. Endure the pain of holding fast to something the Bible says even when people are mocking it? No. No, no, no—I’m not going to suffer for Christ. That’s the human attitude.

So what is the superhuman attitude? To say, “yes” to the suffering? It actually goes further than that. If your battle with temptation is just a battle between “no” and “yes,” that’s no different from the way the world fights temptation. The word Jesus used went beyond *yes*. What word did he use in v.31?

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things...

Man’s word is *no*. Christ’s word is *necessary*. If I want life, I *must* suffer many things—it is necessary. I *must* participate in the sufferings of Christ which includes the suffering that comes when I miss out on some earthly pleasure for his sake.

The Christian life is a process of learning to trade the word “no” for the word “necessary.” If I’m having a hard time giving up some sin because giving it up will hurt, it’s not just a matter of saying, “Well, I should probably do the right thing...” It’s not probably; it’s *must*. Just as Jesus said, “The Son of Man must suffer...” so I need to say, “Darrell Ferguson must suffer this loss.” If God wants me to reconcile a broken relationship and everything in me is saying, “No!” I need to say, “Necessary!” If a bunch of people all agree on some unbiblical idea, and it would just be so embarrassing for me to say, “Well, I believe the other way because that’s what Jesus taught, and I always side with him”—if that’s going to make me look like a fool in their eyes, so be it. It must happen.

I don’t know how that hits you, but this is helpful to me. It helps to be reminded that saying no to sin isn’t like people in the world when they try to avoid some temptation. It’s not just, “I’m trying to have a little self-discipline, make better decisions.” It’s so much bigger than that.

Think of that sin that just seems to get you over and over. The reason it keeps getting you is you’ve trained your soul to have the human attitude in that one area. Imagine yourself facing that temptation and standing alongside the Son of Man saying, “I *must* suffer many things...” It’s a theological necessity, just as it was for him. If I want to move toward life instead of toward death, I must.

Conclusion

Imagine an orphan who has been adopted into the family of a billionaire, and he is one week away from all the papers being signed and moving into the big mansion. One week away—but when the day comes, he is nowhere to be found. He was so envious of his friends who had skateboards and video games and all the stuff he never had, he decided to run away from his foster home and try to somehow get his hands on a skateboard. They never find him and he dies in poverty. That’s what we are like when we make decisions based on this world and this life rather than the kingdom of God and the next life. When

¹⁹ And keep in mind, Peter had this wrong reaction to suffering in the very same moment that he got an A+ on his Christology. Right after he said, “You are the Christ,” he rebuked Christ when Jesus talked about the necessity of suffering. Peter is the author of two famous sayings in Mark. He’s the first to say, “You are the Christ,” and he’s the one who says, “I don’t know the man.” When he was faced with suffering for Christ, he completely collapsed and denied the Lord. His systematic theology was strong, but his practical theology needed work.

Sometimes people can get pretty puffed up about their extensive education in systematic theology, but if your theology doesn’t prepare you for suffering, you need to spend less time on systematic theology and more time on practical theology. And there’s no better place to start than right here—learning how to have the same attitude toward suffering that Jesus had.

Eventually, Peter did understand this. In Acts 4 he preferred to be beaten, imprisoned, and killed rather than stop preaching the gospel.

you hear about somebody winning the lottery, you can think, “I won the lottery, too. The only difference is, the jackpot I got is so much bigger than the one he got—poor guy. He only gets his temporarily and then it will all be taken away. I get mine forever.”