

## Life-with-Life Discipleship

Luke 9:18-27

August 29, 2016

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Please turn with me to the Gospel of Luke. We're going to be looking at some verses in chapter 9. If you flip to the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. If you have an ESV it might be on page 867. As you're turning, as you're putting your eyes on the projector, preparing to hear God's word read—we're just switching from the summer sermon series, from *God & Governance*, to—we'll be starting a new sermon series next week when Pastor Randy Lovelace will return from his time with Robbie Pennington and Anthony Swon. They're currently in Athens working with future partners with a church planting opportunity there in Athens.

And so we go from a couple weeks ago when I preached from Acts 1 to Luke 9. And in some ways they parallel, because it's the same author. Luke wrote the gospel and he wrote the book of Acts. But it's also core to what it means to be a disciple. So much of what Jesus, his ministry was about, he was preaching about the Kingdom of God and he was healing people, and all along the way he was also modeling and demonstrating what it meant for his disciples to follow him. And that's what we're going to be discussing today: the crucial question in the gospel of who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow him. That's discipleship in a nutshell. And that's we're going to look at this morning. So read with me, follow along as I read the passage. Luke 9, starting in verse 18.

<sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" <sup>19</sup> And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

<sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

<sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." [ESV]

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever. Let's pray. Father, we do indeed thank you for your Word. Thank you that Jesus Christ himself is the Word, the Word incarnate, the Word made flesh. That you, God, dwelt among us, came to us, and invited us into a restored relationship with you, to reconcile us back to you. Help us remove our obstacles. May we by faith follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So I did another section of the AT [Appalachian Trail] on Monday. My feet were tired. My feet were sore. It was a very rocky section of Maryland. But I'm reminded again and again, every time I make time on my calendar, every time I schedule: When is it going to be a good time? When is it going to be good weather? When is it going to be good travel? When is it going to be an appropriate time to take a whole day away from my wife and daughters? I typically take my day off to go do that. So here's another section that I enjoyed thoroughly. The weather was beautiful. But it was a reminder of what path I am on—quite literally the Appalachian Trail, but figuratively this path that I'm kind of enjoying, that I plan to enjoy for the next ten years. And I promise I won't make it every illustration for the next ten years. But. But it still is very appropriate. A walk in the woods, a journey along a trail, having a destination in mind, having a reason to walk forward step after step. In so many ways this parallels discipleship. A walk. Many times the authors in the Scriptures even use that language—walking after Christ. Jesus talks about following him. And if you're following someone they're moving, too. And many times Jesus and the disciples were walking, themselves.

So discipleship is one of those words that everybody kind of knows what it means, but no one really knows how to define it or what it looks like, but when you experience it you know what it is. It's one of those nebulous terms. And discipleship in some sense is also how we Christians in America have turned it into this noun, this thing. But you can't separate it from the person. To be in discipleship means you are seeking to be a disciple, which means you are a people, a learner, and—as Jesus says—a follower. You're following someone. You're watching what they do and you're listening to what they say and you're orientating your life around that. I'm orienting my life for the next ten years to try to walk 2100 miles. It takes planning and commitment and pain and joy, as well. So everyone has a working definition, and that's usually based on maybe your own experience—how you came to faith. Maybe that was a college ministry, maybe that was a particular person. But this is one way that we define discipleship, and it's on our website.

“Discipleship is the process in which the Christian learns to obey what God has commanded and reflects the beauty and grace of Christ. This process of growing in grace must be through Spirit-empowered and Gospel-driven practices. At CPC we want to commit ourselves anew to the importance of discipleship.”

And here we have different avenues for discipleship, ranging from community groups to the various cross-cutting ministries that might be more specific to an interest or a passion or a particular direction that you're connected with.

This discipleship is not just you and Jesus. This discipleship involves you following Jesus, but you following Jesus with other people who are following Jesus. There is a mutuality here. There's a corporate nature to discipleship. It's not an individualized pursuit. So whether you're a person who is exploring Christianity for the first time—maybe you're coming back to it again because you still don't know quite yet what to make of it. Maybe you identify as a new Christian, and maybe you identify as a long-time Christian. The gospel that Jesus preaches is that he is more than the messenger. He is the message. We have to come back to that time and time again. And if that's true, then to get to know God's message is to know Jesus, and to know Jesus is to follow him, and to follow him with others. And we're going to look at this with three main ways and then kind of expand it with some application, with looking at how discipleship involves **The Entrance, The Path, The Cost, and The Experience**—particular to here at CPC.

With respect to The Entrance, if you look at verses 18-20, Jesus is drawing our attention to the crucible of the gospel. This is the climax of this passage. It's the pivot point of this Gospel. As Jesus

has been kind of in a very broad way just been traveling around, preaching about the kingdom, he's been healing people, people have been amazed, people have been curious. And Jesus is beginning to pivot and narrow his steps and to narrow his focus and imparting specific things to his twelve disciples on what it means to follow him. And it's in these two questions that he asks.

In verse 18 Luke puts it in the context of Jesus's practice of praying. And we see that his disciples are with him. And in Luke's account—kind of in the greater context—earlier in chapter 9 we see Jesus sending the disciples out on an internship. He's given them a task. He's given them parameters. He said, *OK, I want you to go do something for me. I want you to go out. I want you to preach and I want you to heal. I'm giving you authority to do so. And then come back to me and we'll talk about it.* This internship that the disciples are on is then followed by this passage in verse 7 where Herod is mentioned. And it talks about how he's confused about what's going on in the region at the time, because he thought he had already beheaded John the Baptist. So he doesn't quite understand what's going on, who this Jesus is. And then following that passage we see that the internship is over. The temporary time has come to an end, and the disciples are back with Jesus, their mentor. And they're debriefing and they're talking. And in the midst of that Jesus goes into a neighboring town and he does what he does. He preaches the gospel and he heals people. And then there are people who are hungry, and Jesus says, *You feed them.* So we see the disciples getting another internship, and they're feeding five thousand people.

But what's amazing in all of this is it culminates in these questions that Jesus asks. Notice the first question: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Verse 19 is their response: *John the Baptist. That's what we're hearing. The crowds are saying that we think he's John the Baptist. Others are saying, No, he must be Elijah—who is, by the way, also a dead prophet from a lot longer time ago. And then others are saying, Well, he is just one of the prophets.* One of the other gospel accounts calls him even maybe Jeremiah. So there is this sense of Jesus's public ministry—his preaching and his healing—that the crowds are recognizing something about Jesus being prophetic. Something's on the move. God is speaking once again to his people.

But then Jesus, he drives it down deeper. He gets to the heart of the matter. "Who do you say that I am?" And he's addressing his twelve disciples, but it's Peter who responds in verse 20, "The Christ of God." Some of the other gospel accounts flush this out more, but there is this picture of Peter responding very naturally that he's beginning to see more clearly who Jesus claims to be. Now for them to say that he's the Christ—they still had this political undertone, this political savior, this political warrior that's going to rise up on the throne of David and restore the kingdom of Israel, kick out the Romans, and everything's going to be great once again. Here Peter is getting it, but there's a lot of clues in the text that—as the rest of the gospel unfolds—they're still not quite getting it, but they're responding in faith. They're getting it, that he is the Christ of God. You see, Jesus is teaching those first twelve disciples what it means to be a disciple. They're beginning to see he's not merely a prophet who brings a message. Rather, Jesus is the message.

My own entrance into Christian discipleship was complex and had many facets, and if we had a long time we could really go into a lot of details. But the short of it is I grew up in a Christian home, in a Christian tradition. In many ways Christianity was for me, though, just a system of morality. And often that system of moralism really was calibrated not so much with the moralism of what God has declared, but rather kind of looking to my side—to my left and to my right—where am I in relationship to those around me, and where do I stack up to them. And so for me, in my freshman

year of college I was asked—from this passage for sure, but that same process of being confronted with that question: Who do I say Jesus is?

How do you answer that question? It's an incredibly important question, perhaps the most important question of your life. Do you believe Jesus when he says in John 10 that he is the door of his sheep, and if any enter by him they will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The door is the entry way. And just like I started on The Appalachian Trail, there's a famous archway there in Amicalola, Georgia, that isn't technically even part of the Appalachian Trail—it's the approach trail. It's not even counted in the 2100 miles. But there is this symbolic kind of sense of . . . I took a picture there. I had some stranger take a picture of me. And when you walk through that door—even though I'm not necessarily...I mean I'm still on the approach trail—I am walking through the entrance to an incredibly long journey that's going to be packed with wonderful views, amazing friendships along the way, joys and also sorrows.

So when we look at this passage, and when we hear Jesus ask these questions, he's really inviting us to come through the door. He's inviting us to enter into discipleship with him, to move toward him—to move from merely a face in the crowd, just being an onlooker, curious, amazed at what you might see or what you might hear him say—moving from the crowd to a companion. Moving from your own opinions about him—which could include that he's a good person or maybe he's a wise teacher or maybe he's truly a prophet sent from God—but moving from your own opinions to actually moving to a recognition of who Jesus says himself to be. Anybody can make those claims, of course, but the question still stands: Is it true? Is it valid? Is it right, what he's saying.

And if Jesus is the entrance, well, he lays out **The Path** for his disciples. Looking at first with verses 21 and 22. You see the path is forged by Jesus himself. He says this kind of cryptic message that he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one. There's been much discussion about this verse. None of which we'll have time for right now. But most scholars and I agree that it's more not so much him wanting to keep it hush-hush secret, but it's more of a timing issue. It's not time to declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, because you, my disciples, don't yet know what kind of Messiah I am, what I'm actually going to go do. Which leads us into the next verse. He begins at this point teaching more and more specifically that he is going to suffer many things and be rejected and to be killed. So the path is forged by Jesus himself.

And also the path is forged by Jesus in a way that he then means for his disciples to follow. And this is in verse 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.'" The beautiful thing about these words is . . . In some ways there are kind of three specific imperatives, commands: You gotta do this. But what's interesting about them is they're taken as a whole. This is kind of a total picture of what it means to be a disciple. But it's also the first two—deny yourself and take up your cross—are more like they're not one time things, because he says you're to do this daily, but it really is a point of decision. It's something that is an acknowledgement about your priorities, your loyalties, your allegiance. And this is rooted in what we just talked about with the entrance, Jesus being the door. If he is the Christ, then we are to now, then, walk in His ways, which includes these things.

The interesting thing about 'Take up your cross daily'—which is very much common in our everyday language, which is often used in a way to talk about the burdens that we carry. 'It's the cross that I bear.' And that's fine, it's appropriate. It certainly has its roots in what Jesus has done. But I would suggest to you that Jesus is being a little bit more specific here than just your trials,

your burdens. You see, in that day people would have known what he said with 'Take up your cross.' The Romans called it the *patibulum*. The *patibulum* was the [horizontal] beam of the cross. You see, when someone was convicted and condemned under a Roman court to be executed by crucifixion, the vertical beam was already at the place of crucifixion, which was outside the gates. The convicted took up the *patibulum* across his back, and the convicted had to carry the *patibulum* through the streets in public shame. Here is the rejected, here is the convicted. He is deserving death. Look at him carry his cross.

So what does Jesus mean? Because we know that's what he did, but what does he mean for that for you and for me. What does it mean for his disciples to take up his cross? Right out of the gates, I do think it means that he's inviting his [disciples] on the path of death. I really do. Now that doesn't mean that's a calling for every individual Christian, but I think it's important to bring to your awareness that Jesus, in connecting with who he is as the Messiah, he is talking about a path of discipleship from the get go. He is not this leader, this political leader that is trying to woo you to his entourage and then he gives you a bait and switch. He tells you from the get go **The Cost** involved. Now again, not everybody is going to be called to that, specifically, but it does mean this for our lives to begin to appropriate what that means for us. It means that we are no longer our own. To share our lot with the convicted and the man rejected we are to take on the *patibulum* as Jesus did, to recognize that we are associating with Jesus, who was the convicted, the condemned, the rejected.

The death of Jesus on our behalf is an exchange. You see, apart from Christ we are still dead in our sin. But when we share in Christ's death, we share in his life. Carrying your cross is figurative—most of the time—but it is more specific than merely carrying your burdens. You see, Jesus is inviting us as disciples to consider how we are no longer our own, but we are his. Through Christ's death on the cross comes redemption. He died so that you and I can have life. And this path of discipleship is growing more and more into what it means of carrying that and taking that on and internalizing it and appropriating what Jesus has meaning for us. It's realizing more and more the depth of what was purchased and accomplished on the cross. It's realizing more that because you now live in Christ, you can now deny yourself for the sake of another. You can die because you already live.

And this following Jesus is an ongoing action. This is an everyday occurrence. This is a moment by moment occurrence. Not everybody is going to have that moment of 'What's your confession? Deny Christ or not,' but every moment of your life in some ways is building up to the belief and the faith and the confidence that is your confession, your profession of faith. As we sang earlier this morning, These things we believe and these things we live for and these things we are willing to die for, and that comes with great cost.

So the cost, again, is in Jesus himself giving his life, but in verses 24-27 it involves this paradox of the gospel. This good news of Jesus's announcement that he is the Messiah is also the very seed of the gospel that bears fruit in our life, that gets to handle this tension, that lives in this tension. Because it doesn't make sense! When you say this or when you hear it for the first time you may even have just kind of like, *What?* tilted your head like, *What? What's he saying?* What's going on? And maybe you do know what he's saying, and it's been so long that in some ways the weight of it has lost its luster. But it really is counterintuitive—in our own lives, much less anybody who doesn't claim to be a Christian. They think this is ridiculous. It makes no sense. And yet it comes

with great cost, because it's willing to lay something down. It's willing to give something up for something greater.

At the same time it doesn't make sense, it also makes sense. Does that make sense? We know what it means to exchange something of value in order to hopefully receive something in greater value, or at least something of equal value. We do it every day with our transactions with our cards or our Apple Pay, or bartering services for, you know, cutting your neighbor's lawn and well, you know, you change tools back and forth. Just fundamentally we understand that. But when it comes to great cost to you, we're more hesitant to give up. You see, Jesus suffered rejection. He's inviting us to do the same, but that's harder to swallow. But the paradox of this is this exchange: Jesus rejected, so that we might be received. Jesus suffered the shame of the cross so that we might receive honor and glory. It's giving up in order to receive something greater. This is the cost, but it's also imbedded in the path of what we talked about in verse 23.

So for some people that begins to touch on what's core to you. For some people that might be your wanting to . . . Life is fundamentally OK when you feel secure in your possessions and in your wealth. For others the life you lead is complete when you have gleaned an education, when you've received those degrees that transactionally say that you've been conferred knowledge, intelligence. You've been approved as someone who is a master of something, perhaps, or even a doctor of something. For others—and those things go hand in hand with our success, however we might view that. But success can also be viewed through the lens of relational connection, social status, social esteem with family and friends. It's our reputation.

But if we're taking on the *patibulum*, we're willing to count those things as a cost worth paying, because there's a gain worth receiving. So the cost we must consider is this: It's whether Jesus is worth it. And the answer to that question of his worth depends completely on whether or not he is who he is. What he says, is it true? What he went on to do before us, is that valid? Did it accomplish something? Those become the metrics which we then kind of fold back into those initial questions of, 'Who do I say this Jesus is?' I wasn't one of the original witnesses, but as I read God's word, as I hear people in my life tell me about this Jesus, I've got to fold that into my understanding of things. But at the same time I've got to realize how my understanding of things might be a little off. And this path of discipleship is tweaking and finessing and shaping and transforming our understanding of who God is and the depth of his love for us.

And this brings us to the last point of **Experience**. This is something to be experienced. It's not merely something cognitively thought about, though we often do that. It's so much more. I mean, it goes into even our vision statement here at CPC, that we seek to experience and extend the grace of Jesus Christ here in Columbia, that we would experience and extend the grace of Jesus Christ in the surrounding region, and how that would also flow into how we experience and extend the grace of Jesus Christ in the world. So to do that you have to prioritize things. And our priorities here at CPC are three: worship, discipleship, and mission.

Worship is what we're doing now—on Sunday mornings we gather together. Worship is something you do in the mornings when you are privately and personally going through a devotion and praying and seeking God's face, asking questions of God, asking Him to reveal Himself to you. Which the activity of worship, that practice, those habits form us deeply, and in that sense discipleship is just our growth, growth as Christians. Growth in our confession, growth in our understanding of what we believe. So there is learning. There is knowledge to be gleaned. But it's

more than that. It's seeing the overall story that God is communicating about his word and his world. It's reading and memorizing and meditating on scripture. It's having habits and rhythms and patterns in our life that are cultivating this heart, this heart that is devoted to God, that is full of love for him and for others. So it's not just head knowledge, but it is heart.

And out of this, both of our discipleship transforms us. I don't know if you noticed this particularly when you come here on a Sunday morning, but even our worship is a form of discipleship. The songs we sing this morning, not only are we singing them as praises to God, but they're true statements that then we take in and we meditate on and we think about it and we learn of what's true in God's word, what's true of God's character. And that contributes to the transformational growth that we experience by His grace.

And that flows out into the third priority of mission. The things that we do inside of our church, the things that we do through our church, the things that we do when we partner with churches in Tokyo, Japan, or Athens, Greece, or the Lord willing, that we would be participating with a new partnership in Istanbul, Turkey. These things are our priorities because we recognize that Jesus is the Christ, and we are to follow him.

So the opportunities that we have here. Next week we will be having a time in here before worship at 9:30 a.m. It's an opportunity to learn about the opportunities that are going to be offered this next year for discipleship—that the growing in Christ, growing in our knowledge, transforming our hearts and our affections towards him. That we would equip our hands and our feet to demonstrate the love of Christ. These things will be discussed next week. We do them Sunday mornings with our discipleship classes. Those are going to start September 11<sup>th</sup>.

We experience this in our community groups when we are living life with each other. People are coming to faith. They have to learn the foundations of the faith, so have to be in relationship with more mature believers. More mature believers need to maintain their following of Christ, not in something they do in themselves, but you have to stop being bored with Jesus. And we circle back to our worship of him. We circle back to being amazed and in awe of who he is. That further challenges us. It further encourages us to now, then, move toward other people who are learning in the faith or who are not yet in the faith. We do this in community. We do this with each other. I invite you to consider joining a community group. There are existing groups and there are groups that are forming, even as we speak. (I guess that's figurative. They're not forming right now.) But there are new groups that are forming, and there might be a new group near you. Consider joining with other people in following Christ.

And we do that through what we call cross-cutting ministries. This is that opportunity where our discipleship, our practices—they flow out of our worship, and they're intended for other people's benefit. We have ministries that are part of that learning process, that taking information in, so to speak. But we have ministries that we're part of that are meant, that go beyond our walls, that involve our mission of what it means to be the church. I invite you to consider these opportunities.

What does it look like for you to grow this year? How would you follow Christ this year?

You may have seen this on Thursday. I saw it on the Internet. ABC News Online posted an article and this was the headline: *Kayla Mueller in Captivity – Courage, Selflessness as She Defended Christian Faith to ISIS Executioner 'Jihadi John'*. There is also an accompanying 20/20 piece that goes into more detail about who Kayla is, her family, and the chronology of her captivity. Kayla

was 25 years old. She was working as a humanitarian aid worker in Syria. And at some point she was with a group of 'Doctors without Borders', even though that wasn't the organization she was working with. But she found herself and those other workers abducted. Over, I guess, it was almost an eighteen month period—might have been longer—she experienced isolation, torture. She suffered all forms of abuse. She was forced into slave labor, which has a specific connotation of what kind of slave labor that was. But her fellow hostages said that she never surrendered hope. She selflessly put the welfare of fellow captives above her own. She even stood up to those who were holding her captive to defend her faith. They would bring her in and parade her in front of other prisoners, and they would go on and on about how she is here of her own free will and she has converted to Islam. And she would just say, *No, I didn't*. And this shocked the other prisoners who were terrified themselves. But it also emboldened them and encouraged them in their own plight. And in one point in the interview a young girl, who in the article was named Julia, she tells a story of how Kayla passed up a chance at escape, a chance at escape in order to increase the odds for those other teenagers who were trying to escape. Julia is from the Yazidi tribe, and Julia says this about Kayla. She told Kayla, *We want to escape, and I asked her to come with us. Kayla said, You know, because I'm an American, if I escape with you they will do everything to find us again. It is better for you to escape alone. I will stay here.*

These stories are happening all over. They're happening in Africa. They're happening in the Middle East. Again, life-with-life, as we share discipleship with each other, as we go about discipleship with each other, as we follow Christ—for most of us in this room it may not involve these severe measures. But by following Jesus we begin to acknowledge who he is. We go through that gate, that door. We enter into discipleship. And on that basis the direction and motivation of our lives change. It involves self-denial. It involves taking up your cross daily. And it involves continually, moment by moment, following Jesus. And to follow Jesus is to follow him in his path of rejection, perhaps even death, so that you might experience life and live that life with others and for others. This kind of discipleship is experienced in the context of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, and it's experienced in the context of relationship with each other. The path of discipleship starts with knowing who he is. The path of discipleship involves great cost. But may we join with Paul and how he says, *But with Christ there is gain. There is gain. And I count all things as loss compared to knowing my Lord Jesus Christ.* So as you think about discipleship, your own discipleship, you do need to consider the path that Jesus calls you on. But first and foremost it does begin with those questions he asked those first twelve disciples. It's one thing to know what the crowd says about Jesus, but it's entirely a different thing for you to know who Jesus is.

Let us pray. Father, we do thank you, for your gospel is good news. There is salvation, there is deliverance, there is reconciliation, there is forgiveness. And we hold firm and hold fast to that. But Lord, we also pray for strength and encouragement and wisdom and discernment on how we are to follow you, how we are to grow as your sons and daughters, how we are to grow in our beauty, in our fragrance to other people—that we would look and smell and sound like you, so they may see you and give praise to you, that they, too, might share in your life. We pray these things in your wonderful, magnificent, glorious, matchless name, Jesus. Amen.