

There is a call from Jesus that is so simple, yet so profound. It’s an invitation to a life that is far better than the life most people live, **AND IT’S ONLY TWO WORDS.**

These two words are this- It’s Jesus’ two-word invitation to **“Follow Me”**.

If you say yes to those two words, it will change everything.

When we say we have decided to follow Jesus, some might ask, “How far are you willing to follow?”

One night, my friend Spin and I went to a party at the Saint Simons pier area. We didn’t go to party; we were there to meet people and talk to them about the love of Jesus. Spin had a lot of friends at this party, he had recently surrendered his life to Christ, and was not that far removed from the party scene. One of his friends offered him a beer to which he replied, “No that’s ok, I’m walking with Jesus now.” His intoxicated friend stared for a moment, as if to think what to say, and then replied, “That’s cool bro... just don’t walk too far.” It was almost as if he had heard this story before of people following Jesus and walking with him, only later to fall away. He had an attitude of, “this won’t take that long, you will be right back here partying with us soon enough”.

I wonder, was he speaking from experience? We’ve all seen it before too, haven’t we?

People who zealously start off following Jesus, only to stop following Him later.

This happened in Jesus’ day as well. When He was doing miracles, walking on water, and filling peoples bellies with multiplied fish and bread, many people followed Him. But when His teaching became challenging or too difficult, they struggled. For example, when Jesus started talking about ingesting His body and blood to have true life, many followers left Him.

**John 6:60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”**

They chose not to follow Jesus anymore.

**John 6:66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**

How far are you willing to follow Jesus? Where do you draw the line?

Maybe the better question to ask is, “How far does Jesus expect us to follow Him?”

### **How Far Does Jesus Expect Us to Follow Him?**

In Luke 9, Peter had just declared Jesus as the Messiah. It was his “follower of Jesus declaration” and the other disciples were excited about following Jesus too! Just think of all the advantages! Freedom from Roman oppression, and maybe even twelve thrones for each of them in this New Kingdom Jesus was establishing! Then Jesus said something that totally threw his followers off.

**Luke 9:22 And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”** Not at all what the disciples were expecting for a Messiah!

Not only was Jesus going to experience this, but it would be a pattern and example for them as well.

**Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must:**

- A. deny themselves and**
- B. take up their cross daily and**
- C. follow me.**

What? Follows of Jesus, must deny themselves? Not the way a lot of people sell the idea of being a Christ follower. And what else?...We are to take up a cross daily?

## **Jesus Expects His Followers to Deny Themselves.**

Jesus isn't talking about some external forms of self-denial and severe self-discipline for others to see. Jesus is talking about putting His ways first and seeking His Kingdom first, above all else.

No longer will it be my will, my way. But we will follow Jesus' example for us by totally submitting Himself to the Father's will and the Father's way.

I'm bothered that I can be a selfish person sometimes. I don't want to be, I'm not as selfish as I used to be, but 'self,' even though I try to suppress it, somehow keeps creeping back up. Maybe you deal with that same thing. Our self-interests try to work their way back up to the surface.

It's funny, but we even try to "Christianize" our selfishness! Our prayers ring with, "It's all about me!" I deserve all this and more because, God is blessing me!

We also tend to exalt ourselves above others. We want the world to evolve around us, we want to be the 'Center of the Universe'. To prefer ourselves over others. But Jesus calls us to something different.

**Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

## **Jesus Expects His Followers to Take Up Their Cross Daily**

Remember, when Jesus said this, it was before he went to the cross. When Jesus said this, the cross symbolized the dominance of the Roman empire. It was their form of execution. The Cross was an instrument of death, not just a burden to bear. Taking up your cross to follow Jesus meant that you are willing to sacrificially lay down your life. You are willing to follow Jesus all the way to the end.

**ILL:** When I was a young man, I really liked a song by one of the Christian Music pioneers, Barry McGuire. The lyrics said: *"If I won't die for my Jesus, lay down my life for all to see. If I won't die for my Jesus, then tell me why? Why? Why did he die for me?"*

At 18 years old it was easy to sing that song and mean every word of it! IT WAS EASY THEN! No wife, no children, no house, an old car, some jeans and tee-shirts, and I had no career to lose. It was easy to give it all up to follow Jesus! It was easy to die to myself and lay it all down for Him.

Things have changed now. **I have a lot more to lose.** Am I still willing to lay down my life and "Die to Self"? Can I still say Jesus I will take up my cross and follow you and really mean it?

**BOLD NEXT STEP: Today I will consider if I am really willing to die for Jesus. Can I really say "Jesus I will take up my cross daily and follow you?"**

### **Why Must Followers of Jesus Deny Themselves and Take Up Their Cross Daily?**

#### **1. Followers Die Daily to Experience Real Life!**

**Luke 9:24-25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.**

**25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?**

- Whoever carves out a life for himself doing things their own way, struggles to find themselves and defines themselves according to the world's standard and expectations of others will actually lose their life in the process.
- But whoever is willing to die to self and lose their life for the sake of Jesus will discover true life as Christ Jesus lives through them. **Real life! Life abundant and full! The John 10:10 Life!**

This is the paradox of the Christian Life: Love Life = Lose It. Lose Life = Live  
Keep = Lose / First = Last / Last = First / Great = Humbled / Serve = Great / Give = Receive

## The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

Dying to self is not so much about losing everything for the sake of losing, but it's more about giving all that you have for something that is far, far better!

**Matthew 13:44-46** “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

**45** “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

**46** When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

In these parables we see that the Kingdom of God will cost all that you have!

It could cost you your job, savings, stocks, cars, boats, toys, clothes, family, and EVEN YOU!

- We only want to give up what we don't want or need!
- It's easy to give up things that hurt us, but what about our dreams and desires?

Are you willing to sell, exchange, or even give up everything you have in *your* life for the life that Christ has for you?

**NEXT STEP: This week I will inventory my life and consider if I am still willing to sell or exchange everything for the life that Christ has for me.**

### 2. Followers Die Daily to Be Truly Cared For.

One day, Peter made sure that Jesus knew what his followers had given up to follow Jesus.

**Mark 10:28-30** Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

**29** “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel **30** will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—**along with persecutions**—and in the age to come eternal life.

**Matthew 6:31-33** So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father **knows that you need them.** **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

### 3. Followers Die Daily to Experience the Sustaining Strength of the Holy Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 12:9** And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

We like to say, “I can do all things through Christ”, but if the truth be known, most of the time we are just doing things in our own strength and asking Him to bless our efforts. Have we reached the point where we desperately need Christ's strength and without it we can do nothing?

God is calling you to do something that cannot be accomplished in your own strength.

- If you can fulfill your dreams in your own ability, you are not dreaming big enough.
- You need GOD SIZE DREAMS!

### 4. Followers Die Daily to Become Pliable to Be Molded by God.

God wants to mold you into a vessel fit for every good work. That's why we sing “Have thine own way Lord, Have thine of way. You are the potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me....”

**ILL:** Art class, ugly equaled unique. Clay vessels could be broken and smashed and remolded into something beautiful.

**Isaiah 64:8** Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in **jars of clay** to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

#### 5. Followers Die Daily to Find Life in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:8-12 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, **so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.** 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Romans 6:5-8 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

#### 6. Followers Die Daily to be Fruitful.

John 15. When you bear fruit, it brings glory to the Father.

John 12:23-26 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground **and dies**, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

- Dying to ourselves will produce many seeds which will result in more fruit!
- The servants of Jesus follow Jesus and they are honored by the Father.

#### So How Far Are You Willing to Follow Jesus?

How far? I hope and pray that it's all the way!

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must:

- D. deny themselves and
- E. take up their cross daily and
- F. follow me.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. **Whoever follows me** will never walk in darkness, but will have **the light of life.**"