

Consecration in Action

Luke 9:23-27

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There are many different aspects of our lives that go into decision-making here on earth. People consider their financial portfolio, their lifestyle and comfort, input from their friends and family, and many other factors. But Jesus is about to challenge His disciples to give up their freedoms and their choices and allow Him to determine their path and their future. He still gives us that same challenge today.

Imagine your life in terms of a corporate board room at some high rise, Fortune 500 office building. There's a long mahogany table surrounded with leather chairs. An Executive Committee is seated around that table and each member represents a different aspect of your life.

Seated there is your private self, your work self, your moral self, your recreational self, your financial self, your home self, and others.



What are the different versions of your “self” that have the most impact on the decisions you make for life?

Most of the time, there is conflict in that board room as decisions are made; not every department agrees with each other. There's often tension in the room as the committee members argue and debate and question, and finally vote. It's typically not a unanimous vote.

The average perspective in the church at large today is that following Jesus means you invite Him to serve on the committee; you seat Him at the head of the table; you make Him the chairman. You give Him a vote.

But then He becomes one more complication, one more voice in the debate of how you should run your life.

The biblical viewpoint for a disciple of Christ is that Jesus comes in and fires the committee. Every member. It means saying to the Lord, “There's only one vote

now and it's all yours. You run every department of my life."

Adapted from <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/november/2112111.html>

In Luke's Gospel account, and chapter

9, the Lord has just informed His disciples of some news that doesn't exactly fit with the direction of the committee.

They were looking forward to a kingdom with personal crowns and thrones.

But Jesus just told them in **verse 22** that He would be rejected and killed and then resurrected, three days later.

Matthew's account tells us that Peter, the committee chairman, stepped forward and effectively told the Lord he wasn't going to vote for that. The other disciples were not going to vote that way either.

After the Lord rebuked Peter and reminded the disciples that His mission wasn't up for a vote, the Lord now delivers even more surprising news.

Without any apparent transition, we're told here 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. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 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."

Luke 9:23-26

Before I expound on this text, I want to clear up some misunderstandings. I have read commentary on this passage by authors I appreciate, but it surprises me to read authors who believe in justification by faith alone, but effectively turn this passage into justification by faith plus works.

They don't come out and say it that way, but they use this passage as a legalistic checklist for salvation that they turn around to essentially communicate that:

- If you are ashamed of the Lord at any point in time, you are probably not saved.
- If you are not willing to deny yourself, you are probably not saved.
- If you don't pick up your cross, you are probably not a genuine believer.
- If you are not willing to die for Christ, you are probably not saved either.

At the end of that kind of sermon, everybody is essentially unsure of their salvation because no one consistently denies themselves, carries their cross and speaks boldly for Christ in every situation.

First, Jesus is speaking to His disciples here and the context is one of clarification. He has just informed them that He is going to be killed. He may very well have given them more information than we're provided, because it implies that they knew He was talking about a cross.

In other words, Jesus is now informing them that their lives aren't going to be represented by a crown, but a cross.

Secondly, Jesus is not saying here in **verse 23**, "If anyone wants to *get saved*, let him deny himself."

To interpret it that way turns the free gift of God into something you earn.

Thirdly, Jesus tells them to do something: take up your cross daily.

A works-based interpretation would mean that if on any given day you don't take up your cross, you either lose your salvation or you probably never had it to begin with.

That kind of message leads the believer into introspection and insecurity and—especially to the conscientious believer—discouragement.

The message from Jesus here isn't about salvation, it's about consecration in action.

This isn't a lesson on how to *become* a believer, or even how to *prove* you're a believer, but how to *live* like a believer.

Warren Wiersbe put it so well when he wrote on this text that Jesus isn't talking

about sonship, he's talking about discipleship.

Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13 (Victor Books, 1989), p. 103

Do you want to live a consecrated life that imitates the Savior? Well, here it is.

And with that, the Lord delivers three imperative verbs in the original text, here **in verse 23**. He effectively says here, "If you want walk in fellowship with me as a growing disciple, first of all ..."

It will involve an attitude of humility.

Verse 23 again:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself."

Luke 9:23b

The church at large through the centuries has taken this verse out of context and created all sorts of legalistic and mystic exercises in order to earn the grace of God.

In the late fourth century, Simeon Stylites the Elder lived in the town of Antioch,—now modern-day Turkey—and he was a monk who became famous for his denial of personal comforts.

He literally lived in a small enclosure built on top of a raised column for 37 years.

It was said that he had reached a state of spiritual perfection or purity. Crowds literally flocked to hear a word from him. He was pressed and disturbed over time by the mob; even church leaders would come to the base of his column and hold

mass and special services. Simeon eventually had his pillar raised to some 80 feet in the air; his food had to be hoisted up to him.

He would be venerated by church leaders when he should have been counseled to come down from there and get on with life.

But he was sainted because he had denied himself the comforts of life.

The church also in the fourth century developed the season of Lent, where the spiritually minded person would give up something for 40 days leading up to Easter Sunday; it was all done to personally sacrifice in order to reach a higher plane of spirituality.

You must give up something good.



What are the benefits of denying yourself a particular comfort to focus on God? How do you balance those benefits with the false sense of “spirituality” that can come from these kinds of exercises?

That's not what Jesus is talking about here. The verb here doesn't mean to deny yourself *something good*.

In other words, denying yourself doesn't mean depriving yourself.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 231

But let me tell you, this refers to something much more difficult than sitting on a pillar or giving up something good, like chocolate for 40 days—that would be impossible!

No, verse 23 refers to something harder, here it is: *deny yourself*.

Not deprive yourself; but deny yourself.

Put yourself last. Release, not good desires or good things, but self-centered desires and a self-centered life.

The height of self-centeredness is saying: *I'm going to go live by myself and never let anybody bother me; I'm going to buy a cottage and leave the rat race; I'm going to go someplace where no one will ever bother me again; I'm going to go sit on a pillar undisturbed by people.*

Jesus isn't telling the disciples to escape their world; He's telling them to enter their world with an attitude of selfless humility.

Which is exactly what Jesus did. And the battle to act like Him is a battle of our heart and our flesh; it's a daily battle in that board room.

And it starts young.

Someone sent me this story by email this week: the mom was preparing pancakes for her sons: Kevin is five and Ryan is three. And they began arguing over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw an opportunity to talk about the humility of Jesus and said, “Now boys, if Jesus were sitting here, he would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake.’” They thought about that for a moment

and then Kevin looked at his little brother and said, “Ok Ryan, you be Jesus.”

Remember now, it won’t be long before the disciples are arguing over who is the greatest, who gets the first pancake, so to speak, who sits on the best throne in the kingdom.

Now Jesus not only calls His disciples to understand that consecration in action as we imitate Christ will involve an attitude of humility, secondly:

It will involve a daily priority.

Notice verse 23 again, Jesus says:

“Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily.”

Luke 9:23b

And again, let me straighten out a wrong interpretation here: if there’s something you must do daily in order to be saved, or even prove that your saved, then we’re all in trouble, because if we’re honest, not one of us lives every day like we should as Christ’s disciples.

But that doesn’t mean the goal changes; that doesn’t mean we dumb consecration down. We’re not given excuses here, no, this should be our desire and our direction in life.

Let me point out here that Jesus does not say, “Take up *my* cross daily” no, He says, “take up *his* (*your*) cross daily.”

And that’s because everyone of us has a different cross to bear. Every one of us has been given a different race to run.

Some of you came in here this morning and you’re facing great financial pressure and some of you are rejoicing over a promotion at work.

Some of you are enjoying health and others are dealing with the loss of it.

Some of you have healthy children, but some are like a young couple who called me this weekend to tell me that their only child, just 3-years-old, finally succumbed to a three-year battle with cancer.

“Taking up one’s cross daily means dying daily to your own plans and your own dreams and your agenda.”

Adapted from Swindoll, 231

And it also means saying to the Lord, “There’s only one vote and it’s all Yours.”

And this must be a daily priority because you will face new challenges to your agenda daily, new situations, new people, new problems, and perhaps even new forms of persecution.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p.245

Taking up a cross in the first century was really the most dramatic way you could ever announce that your life was not your own.

Jesus knew all about crucifixion from his culture. When He was around 11 years of age, Judas the Galilean had led a Jewish revolt against Rome. He raided the armory at Sepphoris, where he and his army set up headquarters. This was only four miles from Nazareth, where Jesus was growing up.

The Roman empire struck back with a vengeance, burning Sepphoris to the ground. Jesus would have seen the smoke from that burning town; the Romans sold all the citizens of that town into slavery. They captured two thousand rebels and crucified every one of them, their crosses were lined along the roadside in public view.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster, 1975), p. 121

To see someone on a cross meant they were no longer in charge of their destiny. It meant their life was no longer in their hands.

Carrying your cross communicates to your world that, as a disciple of Christ, your life no longer belongs to you.

There's nobody in the board room of your life but Him. You don't even have a vote; only He does.

This kind of perspective is to become our daily priority.

Discipleship will involve an attitude of humility.

Discipleship will involve a daily priority.

Now thirdly:

It will involve a surrendered identity.

Again, Jesus says here in verse 23:

"Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Luke 9:23b

Frankly, all three commands essentially say the same thing, but in just a slightly different manner.

The verb here **to follow** means "to move behind someone and travel in the same direction."

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 231

Don't miss the obvious: to follow Christ means that He determines the direction. If He moves one way or the other, you're right behind Him, adjusting and responding.



Describe a time when you may have internally resisted giving God control over an area of your life, but eventually you submitted. What did you learn about the faithfulness of God when you trust Him in difficult moments?

If you're following Jesus, that means He's in front; He's in the driver's seat and there are no back seat drivers.

You ever had one of those? I remember driving somewhere when I was a teenager, and my grandmother was in the back seat; she was giving me instructions I wasn't asking for. We called her Granny, and I finally said, "Granny, I'm the one driving." She reached into her purse and then handed up to me what looked exactly like a driver's license, it was a knock off—a gag—and at the top it read, "Authorized Back-seat Driver."

We don't get one of those.

If the Lord is in front, that means we travel at His speed; we turn because He turned; sometimes He picks up the pace and we struggle to keep up and sometimes He travels way too slow for our liking.

Still, we find in Him the life we want to live.

With that, Jesus goes on to give three profound reasons why disciples need to live this way.

The next three verses, **verses 24, 25 and 26**, begin with the word "**For.**" That's the little Greek particle used to explain the purpose of what you've just said.

Swindoll, p. 231

We could translate it "Because" or "This is why..."

Jesus now gives three reasons why we should live as consecrated disciples.

Let me form these reasons as principles, first:

Because it will keep you from becoming absorbed in your own life.

Notice verse 24:

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Luke 9:24

People see the word save here and immediately run to the subject of salvation. Again, Jesus isn't talking about saving your life.

The Greek term for soul, which your translation might use, is *psuche*—the common term for "self"—it represents the entirety of your life.

Barton, p. 246

In other words, if you're saving your life just for yourself—if you're keeping yourself all to yourself—you are going to lose out on any kind of life worth living.

He's not talking about missing out on life in Heaven, he's talking about missing out in life on earth.

Can a believer become selfish and waste his life? Absolutely. Otherwise, Jesus would never have warned us of becoming self-absorbed.

James would never have warned us that ***wherever selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder, a messed-up life (James 3:16).***

The apostle Paul wouldn't have warned the believers in Philippi to ***do nothing from selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3).***

In other words, don't make life all about your life.

Jesus says here, ***"Whoever loses his life for my sake, will save it."***

"Whoever loses his life." One author paraphrased it well: "Whoever loses sight of one's-self."

Ivor Powell, Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Kregel, 1984), p. 225

Another paraphrased it even better:
“Whoever lets loose of his life finds it.”

Trent C. Butler, Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke (Holman Reference, 2000), p. 146

I like that. Let loose of your life for the sake of Christ, this will keep you from becoming absorbed in yourself.

Secondly:

Because it will keep you from being engrossed by the stuff of earth.

Jesus says here in verse 25:

“For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

Luke 9:25

In other words, “Follow Me and you won’t waste your life pursuing things that won’t last.”

Listen, the most important question someone answers in life is this: Heaven or Hell? And once that question is settled, the believer must daily answer the second most important question: Heaven or earth?

Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Luke (Kregel, 2005), p. 147

In other words: now that you are going to Heaven, don’t start living for earth. Is it Heaven or earth?

You answer that question every single day.

Here’s the third reason you need to live a consecrated life:

Because it will keep you from forgetting what’s coming next.

Jesus says here in verse 26:

“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.”

Luke 9:26

Notice carefully, Jesus doesn’t say “of him will the Son of Man be finished with,” or “of him the Son the Man will reject.”

No, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and used this same term in **2 Timothy 1:8**,
“Therefore do not be ashamed (literally, stop being ashamed) of the testimony about our Lord.”

Stop being ashamed. Yes, the world talks about Jesus as a poor carpenter, a false religious leader, a man who died on a cross, a failure in life.

But Timothy, don’t back down; lead the flock not to be ashamed of the gospel; ask Christ for courage to identify with Him and to tell others about Him.

Remember, there’s coming a day when everything will change. We can’t imagine the majesty and splendor of that day

when Christ comes in glory along with a host of angels.

Don't give Him reason to be ashamed of you because you were ashamed to go public with Him.

Then Jesus throws in this comment in verse 27:

"But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:27

I believe Jesus is referring primarily to that signature event where He takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain where the Lord transfigures; that is, where He reveals His post-ascension glory.

The glory of the King in His coming kingdom.

This transfiguration happens to be the next event recorded by Luke here in chapter 9.

Matthew writes about it in chapter 17:

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Matthew 17:2-3

This is one of the most interesting and exciting glimpses into the afterlife we have in Scripture.

Moses and Elijah are there talking to Jesus. And they are still Moses and Elijah, by the way; they didn't change their names. But they are surrounded with brilliant glory.

There's much more to this event and we come to it soon in our study of Luke.

But you can imagine that Peter and James and John never forgot this early taste of kingdom glory.

And here's the point: Jesus wants His disciples to remember what's coming next and we can't imagine the glory of the King and His kingdom!

Because of *that* day, here's how we should live *today*:

- With an attitude of humility.
- With a daily priority.
- With a surrendered identity.

Why? So that we don't become absorbed with just our own lives. So that we don't become engrossed with the things of earth. So that we don't forget the glory of that which is yet to come.

This leads us forward as disciples of Jesus Christ, as we put consecration into action.

It reminds me of the testimony of William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army. Of course, in its earlier years, it was committed primarily to the gospel;

feeding and clothing and educating and helping the poor were bridges over which they delivered the gospel.

Booth's biographers talk about his zeal and devotion to Christ. Although his society thought he was out of his mind to care for the masses; political leaders thought he was wasting his time; even many Christians didn't like his non-traditional approach to ministry, still he persevered and won countless thousands of people to Christ.

His son, Bramwell, once asked him the secret to his courage and commitment to Christ. He told his son that he had knelt in the schoolroom at church one day and gave to God all there was of William Booth. Years later, his daughter Eva said,

"That wasn't really his secret, his secret was that he gave himself to God and then didn't take it back."

Adapted from Vance Christie, *Timeless Stories* (Christian Focus, 2010), p. 34

Would we like to have this kind of testimony as a consecrated disciple like William Booth?

We can.

Start by going into that board room of your heart and firing the members of that committee—you will have to do that every day—and tell Jesus there's only one vote that counts and it's His.

That's how you deny yourself. Then pick up your cross daily, the one God designed for you, and follow—get behind—Christ.

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