



March 22 - Take Up Your Cross

WEEKLY READING: LUKE 9-13

TODAY'S PASSAGE: LUKE 9:21-27

MAIN POINT

In the kingdom of God, the way to true life is death, to true freedom is surrender, and to lasting joy is humility.

PASSAGE: Luke 9:21–27

Jesus Foretells His Death

[21] And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one,

[22] 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.”

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

[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.

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

[25] For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

[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.

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

BACKGROUND

In Luke 9:21–27, Jesus speaks privately with His disciples shortly after Peter has confessed that He is the Christ, the promised Messiah. The main figure in the passage is Jesus, who refers to Himself as the “Son of Man,” a title drawn from Daniel 7:13–14 that emphasizes both His humanity and His divine authority. The disciples are the immediate audience, though Luke notes that others were also present when Jesus began teaching about the cost of following Him. At this point in the Gospel, many Jews

expected the Messiah to be a political deliverer who would overthrow Roman rule and restore Israel's national power. Jesus corrects this expectation by explaining that the Messiah must first suffer, be rejected by the Jewish leadership—the elders, chief priests, and scribes—and be killed before being raised on the third day. This prediction reveals that God's plan of redemption would be accomplished through sacrifice rather than military victory.

Several key phrases shape the meaning of the passage. Jesus calls His followers to “deny” themselves and “take up [their] cross daily,” language that would have been striking to His first-century audience. In Roman culture, carrying a cross was associated with criminals who were forced to carry the crossbeam to the place of execution, symbolizing submission to authority and acceptance of suffering. Jesus uses this imagery to describe the complete surrender required of His disciples. He then presents a paradox: those who try to “save” their lives will lose them, while those who lose their lives for His sake will find true life. The passage concludes with a warning about being ashamed of Christ and a promise that some present would see the kingdom of God revealed in power. Together, these statements emphasize that following Jesus involves sacrifice, humility, and faith in the eternal kingdom He came to establish.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In this passage, Jesus makes clear that His identity as the Messiah cannot be separated from His mission to suffer, die, and rise again. While many in Israel expected a conquering king who would defeat their enemies and restore political power, Jesus reveals that the true work of the Messiah would first be accomplished through sacrifice. His suffering and rejection by the religious leaders would lead to the cross, where He would bear the sins of the world. Yet His death would not be the end. As Jesus foretells, He would be raised on the third day, proving that His sacrifice was accepted and that He truly is the victorious Son of Man. The path of suffering followed by glory fulfills the promises of Scripture, including the suffering servant described in Isaiah 53 and the triumphant Son of Man in Daniel 7.

Jesus also connects His mission to the calling of His followers. Because He gave His life to save sinners, those who trust in Him are called to deny themselves and follow Him with wholehearted devotion. The cross is not only the means of our salvation but also the pattern for our discipleship. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, believers are forgiven, given new life, and invited to live under His lordship. As we follow Christ, we do so with the assurance that the One who calls us to surrender is the same Savior who conquered death and will one day return in glory to establish His kingdom forever.

LIFE GROUP - THE FLOW

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
- 15 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
- 5 minutes - Introduction (icebreaker, activity, or illustration)
- 40 minutes - Study and apply the Bible

YEAR OF PRAYER - GROUP PRAYER (15 min)

If your group is large enough, have members break into groups of 2-3. They can pray out loud through these prompts as you lead. If your group is not big enough to split into groups, encourage members to still pray out loud.

Always pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

We enter your presence to acknowledge that “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all and living through all” (Ephesians 4:5–6). We adore you because You are the one true and living God.

What words of adoration would you share at this time? (pause)

Father God, we acknowledge that there is no way to draw near to You apart from prayer and the knowledge of Your Word to us. It is through prayer that we express our love for You, our faith in You, and our heart of worship. Forgive us when we fail to make time with you in prayer and Bible study a priority.

Reflect for a moment on areas of sin that need to be confessed and repented. (pause)

Thank you for hearing our prayers of confession and repentance. May we return to our first love. A thankful heart is usually a joyful heart—a heart filled with hope rooted in our Lord. I thank You that “Your kingdom is a matter of Your righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Help us to be aware of how the Holy Spirit is always at work within us and all around us. Open our eyes and heart to His ongoing presence.

Please lift your words of thanksgiving now. (pause)

As we offer prayers of petition and intercession, may we never lose sight of the fact that You are seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. May we commit to interceding for others with great fervor and anticipation of how You will answer. May our greatest request always be to bring glory to Your name.

Please share your petitions and intercessions now. (pause)

Have group members start with those we are Asking God to Save:

Friends –

Family –

Co-workers –

Others –

Then have group members share Prayer Requests

We rejoice in Your faithfulness to us. May we desire greater intimacy with you, finding us on our knees more often. We have prayed in faith believing that You are the giver of all good gifts. In Jesus name, Amen

INTRODUCTION (5 min)

As you transition to the passage, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Missionary Jim Elliot (1927–1956)

Jim Elliot was a missionary who felt called to take the gospel to the Huaorani people in Ecuador, a tribe known for violence toward outsiders. Even though he knew the danger, he believed Christ was worth the cost. Shortly before his death, he wrote these famous words in his journal:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Jim Elliot and four other missionaries were killed while trying to reach the tribe. Yet years later, many members of that tribe came to faith in Christ, in great part by the efforts of his wife, Elizabeth Elliot.

Ask the group:

What do you think Jim Elliot meant when he said this?

Transition:

“Jim Elliot’s words echo what Jesus teaches in today’s passage—that real life is found not in holding on to everything, but in surrendering ourselves to Christ. To follow Christ in obedience may require hard choices. When we choose to follow Jesus, we choose sacrifice over selfishness, the cross over comfort, and God’s mission over maintaining the status quo. That’s the nature of the kingdom of God.”

STUDY AND DISCUSS (40 min)

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Teaching Toolbox:

The “Think - Pair - Share” Method

Instead of asking a question and waiting for the same 2–3 people to answer, briefly structure how the group engages with the question.

Step 1 – Think (30–60 seconds)

Ask the question and say something like: “Take a moment to think about that.”

Silence for 30 seconds. This may feel a bit awkward at first, but it gives everyone time to process the question. Try not to answer your own question!

Step 2 – Pair (1–2 minutes)

Then say: “Turn to one person near you and share your thoughts.”

Now everyone talks. Even quieter members often feel more comfortable sharing with just one person.

Step 3 – Share (2–3 minutes)

Then bring the group back together: “What did you talk about?”

People are usually more willing to speak to the whole group after they have already shared their thoughts with someone else.

Tip: Don't use this method for every question. Try it with one or two questions per lesson and see how your group responds – you may hear from people who normally stay quiet!

PASSAGE 1: LUKE 9:21-22

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 9:21-22.

Jesus Foretells His Death

[21] And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one,

[22] 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.”

Commentary

Use the following commentary to help your group gain new insights into the Scripture, background, historical setting, and theological truths found in these verses.

Luke 9:21

After Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Luke 9:20), Jesus strictly commands the disciples not to tell anyone. Luke emphasizes the seriousness of this instruction, suggesting a strong warning. In the first-century Jewish context, the title “Messiah” carried political expectations. Many Jews believed the Messiah would overthrow Roman rule and restore Israel’s national power. If Jesus had been publicly proclaimed as Messiah at this stage, the crowds might have attempted to make Him a political king, as happened in John 6:15.

By controlling when His identity is revealed, Jesus ensures that people understand His mission correctly. The Messiah must first be known as the suffering Servant before He is recognized as the reigning King. Only after His death and resurrection will the disciples fully grasp the nature of His kingdom.

Luke 9:22

Jesus immediately explains what being the Messiah truly means. The phrase “must suffer” indicates divine necessity—His suffering is not accidental but part of God’s redemptive plan. Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 foretold a servant who would suffer and be rejected for the sins of others. Jesus specifically names the elders, chief priests, and scribes—the groups that made up the Jewish ruling council known as the Sanhedrin.

Ironically, the very leaders responsible for teaching the Scriptures would reject the One the Scriptures foretold (John 5:39–40). Yet Jesus’ prediction does not end with suffering and death. He also promises that He will be raised on the third day. This resurrection assures the disciples that suffering will ultimately give way to victory, revealing God’s plan of redemption through the cross.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students:** What does Jesus ask His followers to do in verse 23? Which part of that sounds hardest to you?
2. Peter called Jesus the Messiah, but many people expected the Messiah to become a powerful political ruler. How does Jesus' prediction about suffering and rejection challenge that expectation?
3. Jesus says that following Him involves denying ourselves and taking up our cross. What are some everyday situations where a Christian might need to choose obedience to Jesus over personal comfort or popularity?
4. **Deeper Dive:** Jesus does not invite people merely to admire Him but to surrender their lives to Him. What are some ways modern Christians may unintentionally reshape Jesus into a Savior who blesses our plans rather than a Lord who directs them? How can we recognize when we have subtly placed our own priorities above His call to deny ourselves?

PASSAGE 2: LUKE 9:23-27

READ THE PASSAGE : HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 9:23-27.

Luke 9:23–27

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

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Commentary

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Luke 9:23

After explaining His own mission, Jesus extends the call of discipleship to “anyone” who would follow Him. The first requirement is to “deny himself,” which means more than giving up comforts or habits. It involves surrendering the right to rule one’s own life and submitting fully to Christ’s authority.

Jesus then commands His followers to “take up his cross daily.” In Roman culture, a condemned criminal carried the crossbeam to the place of execution, symbolizing submission to Roman authority and acceptance of death. For Jesus’ listeners, this imagery represented complete surrender and willingness to endure hardship for His sake. The word “daily” emphasizes that discipleship is not a one-time decision but a continual pattern of life. True followers of Christ repeatedly choose obedience, trusting that His path leads to life.

Luke 9:24

Jesus explains the paradox at the heart of discipleship. Those who seek to preserve their life ultimately lose it, while those who lose their life for His sake will save it. The term translated “life” can refer both to physical life and to the deeper reality of one’s soul or eternal existence. In the natural human instinct, people strive to protect their security, reputation, and comfort. Yet Jesus teaches that clinging to these things above all else results in spiritual loss. By contrast, those who willingly surrender their lives to Christ—placing obedience above self-preservation—gain the true life God intends.

This teaching echoes a broader biblical principle that God’s kingdom often reverses worldly expectations. The path to life is found through surrender rather than self-assertion. Jesus Himself models this pattern through His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. In Philippians 2:8–9, Paul describes how Christ humbled Himself even to death on a cross and was therefore exalted by God. Likewise, believers experience the fullness of life not by protecting themselves from sacrifice but by entrusting their lives to Christ’s purposes.

Luke 9:25

Jesus reinforces His teaching with a rhetorical question about profit and loss. In both the ancient world and today, wealth, influence, and success are often seen as the ultimate goals of life. Jesus challenges this perspective by asking what value such achievements have if a person loses his soul. The soul represents the eternal aspect of human life, created in God’s image and destined for eternity. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that eternal realities far outweigh temporary gains (Psalm 49:16–20).

Even if someone could gain the entire world, such success would ultimately be meaningless if it resulted in separation from God. Jesus calls His followers to evaluate life through the lens of eternity, recognizing that true treasure is found in fellowship with God and faithful obedience to Him.

Luke 9:26

Jesus then warns about the danger of being ashamed of Him and His words. In the first-century context, openly identifying with Jesus could lead to rejection from religious communities, family conflict, or even persecution. The temptation to distance oneself from Christ in order to avoid hardship would have been very real. Jesus reminds His disciples that their loyalty will ultimately be revealed when He returns in glory.

The imagery echoes Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man receives authority and dominion from God. At His return, Jesus will come in the glory of the Father and the holy angels, demonstrating His divine authority as the rightful King. Those who faithfully acknowledge Him now will be honored before the Father, while those who reject Him will face judgment.

Luke 9:27

Jesus concludes with a promise that some of those present will see the kingdom of God before they die. Many conservative scholars understand this statement as referring primarily to the Transfiguration described in the following verses (Luke 9:28–36). During that event, Peter, James, and John witness Jesus revealed in radiant glory alongside Moses and Elijah, providing a preview of the coming kingdom.

Others also note that the resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost further display the arrival of God's kingdom in power. Regardless of the specific event emphasized, Jesus assures His disciples that God's kingdom is not merely a distant hope but a reality that will soon break into history through His work.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students:** Jesus says that trying to “save your life” can cause you to lose it. In your own words, what do you think He means?
 2. Jesus tells His followers to take up their cross daily. Why do you think following Him requires a daily choice rather than a one-time decision?
 3. Jesus warns against being ashamed of Him. What are some situations today where someone might feel pressure to hide or downplay their faith?
 4. **Deeper Dive:** Jesus asks what it profits someone to gain the whole world but lose their soul. In subtle ways, how might Christians still pursue success, security, or reputation as if those things were ultimate? What practices or priorities help guard our hearts from drifting toward a life that looks successful by the world's standards but empty in God's eyes?
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OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Choose one of the following activities if time allows.

FIRST OPTION: “TWO PATHS” WHITEBOARD EXERCISE

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: Whiteboard

Draw two columns on the board:

Column 1: Saving Your Life

Column 2: Losing Your Life for Jesus

Ask the group:

Based on this passage, what might each of these look like in real life?

Have people call out examples.

Examples might include:

Saving life:

- Protecting reputation
- Avoiding hard obedience
- Living for comfort

Losing life:

- Obeying Christ even when costly
- Choosing service over status
- Speaking truth when unpopular

Then ask:

Which path does our culture encourage more?

SECOND OPTION: “CIRCLE THE COMMANDS” TEXT OBSERVATION

Time: 3–5 minutes

Supplies: Bibles or printed passage, whiteboard

Ask everyone to quickly read Luke 9:21–27 again and look for commands or actions Jesus calls for.

Have them share what they find.

They’ll notice things like:

- Deny yourself
- Take up your cross
- Follow me
- Not be ashamed of Him

Write those on the board.

Then ask:

Which of these is hardest for you personally?

FINAL TAKEAWAY

After discussion concludes, read the takeaway statement and then invite someone in the group to close in prayer.

Following Jesus means trusting Him enough to surrender our lives daily, believing that the life He offers is better than the one we try to hold onto.