Luke 9:23–26 | "Following Jesus"

Preached on November 1, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn your Bibles to Luke 9:23–26. *[pauseee]*

Today, I'm starting a brand new, six week series on following Jesus' method of discipleship. *[pause]*

We will look specifically at how Jesus discipled his disciples, as it will give us great insight into how we should disciple others. *[pauseee]*

This first week will lay the foundation of what it actually means to follow Jesus as a disciple. *[pause]*

If we are going to follow Jesus' way of discipling, then we ought to first be one of His disciples, and also know what we are calling people to. *[pauseeeee]*

As Americans, we are used to seeing advertisements *everywhere*. *[pause]*

It's rare if we go through a day without seeing an ad promoting some business or product. *[pausee]*

What an advertisement usually does is spotlight the benefits of what they want you to buy, join, or do. *[pause]*

It would be strange, indeed, if an advertisement highlighted the hardships of what would be involved in getting their item or joining their cause. *[pausee]*

Imagine some organization saying, "It will cost you this much money, and this much time. It will be super hard, unpleasant, and uncomfortable. Want in?" *[pause]*

Or imagine a company promoted their product by saying, "It's going to be so painful to use this product, but trust us, it's worth it!" *[pause]*

Not the greatest tagline, is it? *[pauseee]*

We would probably be shocked at such a tactic, and say, "No, thank you," yet what's interesting is that Jesus highlights the *cost* of following Him. *[pause]*

He will explain to us the eternal benefit, but he will also explain the extreme sacrifice. *[pause]*

Strange way to get people to follow you, isn't it?

Yet that's how Jesus speaks here in Luke 9:23–26, for just listen to what he says. *[READ 9:23–26]*

Before this text, Jesus fed the 5,000 in an amazing display of power. *[pause]*

After that, Peter confessed who Jesus was by calling him, "The Christ of God." *[pause]*

From the disciples point of view, things were trending in a great direction, as they were looking for a conquering King, and Jesus seemed to fit the bill. *[pause]*

Yet all of a sudden, Jesus tells them about how he is going to suffer, die, and rise again.

And that was probably baffling to them because they only saw an easy victory on the horizon with Jesus by their side, and now he's talking about how he would suffer and die? *[pause]*

But here's the thing: this kind of talk doesn't stop there, for now in our passage, he calls *them* to suffer, too. *[pausee]*

What the disciples and we learn is that following Jesus isn't all glorious ease, but grueling sacrifice is involved, too.

But in the end, though, it will be worth it. *[pauseeee]*

Looking closely at Luke 9:23–26, we see first that…

I. Following Jesus requires a lifelong commitment to Christ, not self. (23)

There's many things that are simple and easy to do in our day. *[pause]*

To join something takes a few clicks on a website, or a signature here and there.

You can be a member of a hundred different rewards programs by doing a few easy steps. *[pausee]*

It doesn't take much to join a gym, a group, or organization.

We live in a day and age where the cost of commitment is extremely low in many regards. *[pause]*

We are used to canceling things anytime we want, or hearing, "No commitment required!" but you cannot approach following Christ like that. *[pauseee]*

What we see here is that following Jesus takes a lifelong commitment. *[pause]*

He starts out by saying, "If anyone would come after me." *[pause]*

What good news to hear: "If anyone"! *[pause]*

Following Jesus isn't limited to a select group of people like some groups or organizations or causes—following Jesus is open to "anyone"! *[pauseeee]*

Next, we see that an important part of following Jesus is *the desire to do so*. *[pause]*

Usually before you commit to something, you desire to do it.

So also, the desire to follow Christ is vital for any true disciple. *[pause]*

The ESV translates verse 23 as, "If anyone 'would' come after me."

And that word, "would," is actually the word for 'want' or 'desire,' so it's talking about people who desire or want to come after Jesus. *[pauseee]*

Genuine following after Christ comes from a desire to do so. *[pause]*

A person sees Christ for who He is. *[pause]*

They are compelled to follow after the Savior, who is gentle and lowly.[1]

They understand that He's worth it, and they say, "I want to follow ***Him***!" *[pauseeee]*

Where does this desire ultimately come from?...God must work in our hearts to desire Christ. *[pause]*

He softens our hearts, and opens our eyes to see Him.

So if you are a follower of Jesus, do you recognize that you only desired to do so because God led you to? *[pause]*

The self-denial Jesus calls us to is only possible when God's grace implants a *desire* for Christ above all. *[pauseeee]*

Now what does it mean to follow Christ? *[pause]*

We see here that Jesus uses the phrase, "come after," as a way of speaking about following Him. *[pause]*

To 'come after' Jesus is to come 'behind' Him.

And this means that to follow Jesus, you must come behind Jesus, not before Him. *[pauseee]*

So many people want to be the leader, while Jesus is there to just rubber stamp their decisions—that's not the way. *[pauseee]*

Some people look down on being a follower, and pride themselves on being a leader, but we see here that we should actually *cherish* being a follower and not a leader when it comes to Jesus. *[pauseee]*

To follow or come after Jesus means to adhere to Him and His way of life—it's to be a lifelong student of Him. *[pause]*

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[1] A reference to Matthew 11:29.

Where He goes, you go—what He says, you obey—His way of life is to be your way of life. *[pause]*

You are not to be the ultimate determiner of how you live, but Christ is to be. *[pauseee]*

Every Christian is a follower...

Not a follower of the world, not a follower of your friends, or some influencer, but fundamentally a follower of Jesus. *[pauseee]*

Some people see Jesus as someone to respect and admire, but not to follow. *[pause]*

"He was a good teacher or a miracle-worker," they say. *[pause]*

Others see Him as a real, historical person and that's it.

But Jesus doesn't call people to merely believe He exists or admire Him from a distance—He calls people to come after Him! *[pauseee]*

Have you 'come after' Christ? *[pause]*

Is your life lived with Him as your Master? *[pause]*

Are you before or behind Him? *[pauseeee]*

This self-denying nature of following Him is what Jesus highlights when He says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself." *[pause]*

To be a disciple of Jesus, you cannot put yourself first. *[pauseee]*

This makes sense when you think about it…

How can someone be saved, if they think, "I don't need Christ, I'll save myself"? *[pause]*

Inherent to being saved is an acknowledgement that *I* don't have the answer, but Christ does. *[pause]*

No one is saved by their own hand. *[pauseeee]*

So we deny ourselves when we repent and turn in faith to Jesus, but this denial of self is to *continue* as we follow Him. *[pause]*

We don't turn to Christ at salvation, and then turn to self for the rest of our lives.

No, a follower of Jesus puts Jesus first throughout their lives. *[pauseee]*

This won't be perfectly done, as we all stumble at times, but a true follower of Christ will recognize what they're doing, and get back on the path of self-denial and Christ-devotion. *[pauseeee]*

Now what exactly does it mean to deny yourself?...

Well it's the opposite of living for self. *[pause]*

To deny yourself is to disregard your own interests in light of what Christ wants.

It's to say 'No' to self, and 'Yes' to Christ. *[pausee]*

You refrain from indulging in your desires, and instead, your desires are directed by what Jesus wants. *[pause]*

You are no longer the determining factor, the Lord is now, and you give Him supreme allegiance. *[pauseee]*

Since the Fall, mankind has been about self, but we see in our day an especially great amount of self-love being promoted. *[pause]*

Everything has become about what *you* want. *[pause]*

If you want something, our world says, "Then go get it!"

If you feel something, you are called to pursue that. *[pause]*

Our culture tells us to love ourselves above all, but listen up: following the path of self-love is following the path of self-destruction. *[pauseeee]*

This self-denial is not just for the super holy people, but *every* disciple is to be a person who denies self in order to follow Christ. *[pause]*

It is required, not optional…

Some Christians think, "Yeah, it's great that pastors and missionaries deny themselves in order to serve the Lord, but that's not for me." *[pause]*

They then just do whatever they feel like doing without regard for God, but what did Jesus just say?…

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself." *[pauseee]*

We live in a day where 'cheap grace' is promoted. *[pause]*

People think they can just take a few things from Jesus' teachings and leave the rest. *[pause]*

They think that they can live how they want, and just add Jesus on as a safety valve. *[pause]*

They want the benefits of following Jesus without the cost of following Jesus.

But Jesus makes it clear: it's all or nothing—either you live for self or for Christ. *[pauseeee]*

This denial of self is not a little thing. *[pause]*

It's not something like giving up overeating on Tuesdays. *[pause]*

It's a deep, whole-life self-denial, for we see that it involves taking up your cross daily and following Him. *[pauseeee]*

To take up your cross is a call to be ready to endure suffering, even to the point of death, if needed.[2] *[pauseee]*

So many people see following Jesus as some add-on to their life.

They see it as this thing on the side that they do on Sundays. *[pause]*

It's not really a big deal to them, but something minor in their life, but Jesus is making it clear that to follow Him in a serious, whole-life thing. *[pauseee]*

You are actually giving over your life to Christ when you follow Him. *[pause]*

You are surrendering your very life, saying, "Lord, I will follow you anywhere, come what may." *[pauseeee]*

Following Jesus is not a "one-time decision" like some people see it. *[pause]*

So many have said that they prayed a prayer and yet the rest of their life, they live for self, and God is nowhere to be seen in their lives.

That is not being a disciple of Jesus, for we see that we are to take up our cross *daily*. *[pauseeee]*

This is a life-long commitment to following Jesus. *[pauseee]*

To follow Jesus is to say, "I'm in this for the long-haul, Lord. I'll follow you to the end!" *[pause]*

You see, to really do this, you cannot love self above all, but Christ above all—He must be your utmost desire. *[pause]*

He must be Lord in your life, toppling your own lordship. *[pauseeee]*

"A missionary society wrote to David Livingstone and asked, 'Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you.' *[pause]*

Livingstone wrote back, 'If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all.'"[3] *[pauseee]*

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[2] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 285.
[3] Original from *Good News Broadcaster*, April, 1985, p. 12. Found at: https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/c/commitment.htm.

Are you willing to follow Christ, even if you can't see where the road is going? *[pauseee]*

A life-long, committed following after Christ is what we are to do as disciples of Jesus, do you see being a disciple that way? *[pause]*

It certainly won't look perfect, as we will all mess up and fall short, and God's grace will extend to us there. *[pause]*

But we will recognize what we have been doing, and by God's strength, renew our commitment to the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

We saw first that following Jesus involves a lifelong commitment, but we see next that…

II. Following Jesus has eternal significance. (24–26)

Most kids go through a certain stage of childhood where they keep asking the word, "Why?" *[pause]*

After a while, it can get on the parents' nerves, but 'why' is a good question. *[pause]*

Whenever we look at doing something, the 'how' matters, but so does the 'why.' *[pauseee]*

So far, we saw 'how' one is to follow Christ and what is involved, but now Christ teaches us the 'why' of following Him. *[pause]*

Verse 24 says, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." *[pause]*

Now that's paradoxical: save your life now, you lose it, but give up your life for Jesus, and you will save it. *[pauseee]*

You can't establish your life based on what you want, and expect it to turn out well. *[pause]*

The reason is because when you live for self, then God is pushed out.

You have rejected the Savior for yourself, who cannot save. *[pauseee]*

The end of that way of life is loss—it is eternal condemnation rather than eternal life, and the reason is because if you put yourself first, where is the place for Jesus? *[pauseee]*

Where's the humility to admit that you are a great sinner in need of a Savior?

Where's the sorrowful repentance over sin and the submission to King Jesus? *[pause]*

Once again, you cannot save your life by your own hand. *[pauseeee]*

In order to do this, you must be ready to forsake the things of this world and live for God because He is most precious to you. *[pause]*

Essentially, you love Christ more than what you can receive in this temporary life. *[pauseeee]*

Next, verse 25 teaches us that eternity is worth more than the whole world…

Verse 25 says, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" *[pausee]*

What good would it do, if you gained everything in this world, but once you died, you faced an eternity in Hell? *[pause]*

What use would it be?

It may have been temporarily nice, but it's eternally disastrous. *[pauseee]*

Those who live for self in order to gain money, possessions, position, or power certainly 'gain' it. *[pause]*

They worked hard to make a profit.

They have put blood, sweat, and tears into gaining the world, but eternal life cannot be *earned*. *[pause]*

You can earn some money and positions, but you cannot earn Heaven. *[pauseee]*

If you do not turn to Christ in faith, everything you earned in this life will be forfeited when you die…

Your earthly earnings will ultimately be eternal losses. *[pauseee]*

It does no good when you die and have to stand before the Creator.

So giving up your life in this age for Christ is a small price to pay when you look at the big picture. *[pauseee]*

Your life in God's hands is secure—your life in your own hands is insecure. *[pauseee]*

What we find is that everything earned in this world all *combined* cannot measure up to what Christ gives us by grace. *[pause]*

The way to eternal life, eternal joy, eternal blessing is not to gather up, collect, earn, and live for self.

It is to lay it all down in order to have Christ. *[pauseee]*

It is to say like the hymn, "Rock of Ages," says…

"Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die."[4] *[pauseee]*

In order to follow Christ, you cannot live for self, but neither can you deny Christ. *[pause]*

Verse 26 says, "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." *[pauseee]*

Love for self leads someone to deny Christ, and the reason is because following Jesus can bring with it reproach from others. *[pause]*

They may make fun of you.

They may call you names like, "Bigot," "Closeminded," or things like that.

The world hates the *whole* Christ. *[pauseee]*

They love to pick and choose things they like about Him, but not the whole Christ. *[pause]*

They hate that He's the only way, for how dare you say there aren't other ways? *[pause]*

They hate how He calls certain things sins, and so they try to twist what He has said. *[pause]*

They hate what He says about Hell, and so just ignore that part of His teachings.

And they hate the demands He places on people's lives, and how He must be Lord. *[pauseee]*

If you faithfully uphold Christ: the whole Christ, the real Christ, the full teachings of Christ, you *will* face persecution in some way, shape, or form. *[pauseee]*

You see, if you live for self, you will give into what the world thinks about Jesus.

You'll bend some, twisting what Jesus said, ignoring it altogether, or reject Him outright. *[pause]*

You will feel embarrassed of Him and His teachings when others mock it or call it hateful, and the reason is because you love you and your comfort over Christ. *[pausee]*

But if you love Christ above all, denying yourself and your comforts, because you see Him as *worth everything*…

Then you will be willing to face the mockery, the slander, the ridicule, and derision. *[pauseee]*

What Jesus says here is a serious, shocking statement…

If you are ashamed of Him and His words, He will be ashamed of you when He comes again. *[pause]*

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[4] "Rock of Ages" by Augustus Toplady, 1776.

The reason is because your embarrassment of Jesus shows your relationship to Jesus. *[pausee]*

He's someone that you feel like you can take or leave. *[pause]*

He's someone that you feel that you don't have to submit your life to.

He's someone that you aren't truly following. *[pauseee]*

People may see Jesus as optional, or they may put Him down, mock Him, make fun of Him, and more, but He *is* coming again in glory. *[pause]*

The King and Lord *is* coming, and one day everyone will have to answer for how they responded to Him. *[pauseee]*

Is He just someone who blesses your life, like an add-on? *[pause]*

Is He just someone who provides some good advice?

Or is He EVERYTHING to you, for you have chosen to deny yourself and follow Him? *[pauseeee]*

Famous opera singer, Luciano Pavarotti, shared a story of his childhood. *[pause]*

He said, "When I was a boy, my father urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. *[pause]*

A professional tenor in my hometown took me as a pupil, [and] I also enrolled in a teachers college. *[pause]*

On graduating, I asked my father, 'Shall I be a teacher or a singer?' *[pause]*

'Luciano,' my father replied, 'if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair.'"[5] *[pauseee]*

So many people are trying to sit on two chairs when it comes to their life…

They want to live for self, and add a little Jesus into the mix for good measure, but Jesus calls us to choose one chair: self or Him. *[pauseee]*

Following Jesus is no trivial thing, but a serious thing—your eternity hinges on what you do with Christ. *[pauseee]*

This passage shows us that…

Followers of Jesus see following Him as worth every cost in this life.

Jesus wants us to consider the eternal cost of either being His disciple or not. *[pause]*

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[5] Original from *Guideposts*. Found at: https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/c/commitment.htm. (Slightly edited).

This is no minor decision...

It's not like choosing what to eat for lunch or even what job to pursue, for it affects your eternity. *[pauseee]*

To not come after Christ is eternally disastrous, for it is ultimately losing your life.

But to deny yourself and come after Christ is eternally *worth it*. *[pauseee]*

It's worth the self-denial, the potential suffering, not gaining all of the material things of this life, and the shame that others heap upon us. *[pause]*

It's eternally worth it, for we are following the Son of Man, who will come again in glory. *[pauseeee]*

When we follow Him, we find true life: eternal life.

And the reason is because as He mentioned before this passage, He would suffer, die, and rise again. *[pauseee]*

This would be no accident or wrench in the plan of God, but the very plan of God to redeem us from sin…

Jesus came to this earth, being born of a virgin, lived the perfect life, died on the Cross for our sins, and then rose again. *[pauseee]*

We deserved eternal death, for we sinned against the eternal God.

But Jesus took up *His* cross all the way to death, so that our lives could be saved. *[pause]*

Instead of saving His own life, He lost His life for our sake, in order to save ours.

And now we eternally profit due to His gracious act, if we would simply repent and trust in Him. *[pauseeee]*

This passage shows us the foundation of what it means to be a disciple: we must follow Jesus, and follow Him *this* way. *[pause]*

This is what *we* are called to, but it's also what we call *others* to. *[pause]*

As we point people to Jesus, we must show them that this is what true discipleship means…

It's not making sure they simply said the right words, but making sure they understand who Christ is and what Christ is calling them to. *[pauseee]*

As we speak to people about Jesus, let's not merely speak about blessings and prospering, but let's speak about the radical cost, too. *[pauseee]*

We don't say this to push them away, but we say this because this is what Jesus spoke about—He spoke about "counting the cost."[6] *[pause]*

As we do so, we don't say, "It's miserable," but we say, "It's totally worth it because look at *who* we are following!" *[pauseee]*

We follow the Savior, the Lord, the Son of Man, who is coming again in glory, and this matters for eternity. *[pauseee]*

Followers of Jesus see following Him as worth every cost in this life. *[pause]*

Have you seen Him as worth everything?

And if so, will you lead others to the same place?

[6] This passage highlights the cost, but even more clear is Luke 14:25–33.