

Group Study Guide

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

First Things First

Luke 9:23-27

May 20th, 2018

Main Point

As true followers of Jesus, we are called to live for Him as we use our time, relationships, resources, talents, and every breath to serve God and others, to sacrificially give to His Kingdom, and to share His great news of salvation in word and deed with the world around us. We are called to put First Things First.

Getting Started

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, 'Put first things first?' This familiar phrase is a proverb that carries different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In this passage it means that Jesus is preeminent and his value cannot be measured. While speaking with a gathered crowd, not just the disciples, Jesus underscores our need to acknowledge his ultimate value in all our pursuits. He is preeminent not because we 'make him Lord of our lives' but because he is Lord whether we realize it or not. We truly will put first things first when we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Observation

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

Have a volunteer read Luke 9:23-24.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus delivered quite the command to His followers. He asked them to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him. Jesus was addressing not just the twelve disciples, but all who claim to follow Him. It's a statement that leads us to consider our priorities and what we value most.

What does Jesus require of someone who wishes to be His disciple?

What do Jesus' words say about our motivation for putting Him first? Why is a right motive important for putting him first in all our pursuits?

What's the relationship between following Him and serving Him? Can you have one without the other?

How does denying ourselves or losing our lives for Christ's sake benefit us? Consider that Jesus' command is ultimately selfish in a good way because of the eternal benefits of putting Jesus first.

Have a volunteer read Luke 9:25-27.

No matter how wealthy a person is in this life, he will be bankrupt eternally if he dies without Christ. This passage underscores the importance of putting first things first. We have nothing without Christ! His worth is immeasurable; it cannot be calculated.

Some profit is not worth the effort to obtain it. What does a person gain by pursuing what the world values? What does Jesus say is infinitely more valuable than gaining the entire world?

What does Jesus tell the crowd will happen to those who are ashamed of Jesus and his words? Notice how Jesus does not distinguish between himself and his words.

When will those who are ashamed of Jesus be shunned by him? What event is Jesus referencing in verse 26?

Read verse 27 and then verses 28 through 36. Verse 27 Jesus refers to the transfiguration. Peter, John and James witness the transfiguration of Jesus before their eyes. How did the transfiguration reveal a glimpse of Jesus' worth and identity?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Spend time in silent prayer asking God to show you what it would look like for you in the coming week to truly deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him. Ask Jesus to help you follow him in this way. Only Jesus can give us the strength to follow after him.

How are you losing your life for the sake of Christ? What does it mean to lose your life for Jesus' sake? Ask God to remove any fear you may have over what you may lose for following Jesus. Pray that God replaces your fears with confidence in Christ and his promises for you.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:11. How does this verse reflect the meaning of Jesus' admonition that we take up our cross? What is the upside of dying to ourselves so that Jesus might live in us? Why is it so hard to die to ourselves? What in us resists that kind of death?

Read Philippians 2:9-11. Notice how this passage establishes the preeminence of Christ over all things. God has exalted Jesus above all authority, possessions and people. It only makes sense, considering who Jesus is, to put him first! Discuss as a group the implications of his preeminence on our everyday lives.

Prayer

In your prayer time this week, ask God to show you how to put first things first. Consider what this means for your marriage, your work, your home life, your parenting, your leisure time and your financial resources. Determine in prayer not to pursue the world's priorities but to seek His kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Commentary

Jesus addressed all the people around Him, the disciples and a crowd (see Mark 8:34). He forcefully stated the demands of discipleship—what He required of His followers. Interestingly, He directed His words to the Twelve because they yet could not accept that the Messiah would suffer and die; thus, they had no concept of discipleship that included suffering and death. Any in the larger crowd considering going with Jesus had to be aware of the cost of discipleship.

First, Jesus declared that anyone wanting to follow Him had to deny himself. He did not mean His followers must deny themselves something; they had to deny themselves. They had to replace self at the center of their lives and enthrone Jesus as absolute Lord. They had to remove selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-serving to develop the self-giving lifestyle Jesus modeled. They were to give up worldly ambition for prestige and power. Self-sacrifice was to replace self-indulgence.

Second, Jesus required a person who would follow Him to carry his cross daily. In the first century, a cross was not a fashion statement or an ornament of beauty or decoration, but an instrument of cruel torture and painful death. Thus, Jesus called people to follow Him, even to death. The word *his* indicates that each believer faces Jesus' demand of total commitment to Him and His redemptive purpose. The term *daily* emphasizes the consistency of loyalty and ministry He requires. Becoming identified with Him and His redemptive mission is risky and demanding, yet He summons people to walk with Him on the road less traveled: self-sacrifice. Contrary to popular Christian tradition, Jesus did not indicate that life's negative experiences such as ailments, wayward children, or lesser lots in life are crosses; the cross believers bear is the lifestyle of self-sacrificial service Jesus modeled.

Third, Jesus called individuals to follow Him. They were to keep on following Him in unflagging loyalty. Thus, the third condition of discipleship is consistent obedience. Jesus used a striking paradox to emphasize His point. The person who purposes to save his life will lose it. The individual who hoards life—who seeks to gratify self—not only will forfeit full and meaningful life, but also eternal life. Conversely, the person who loses his life because of Christ will save it. The individual who meets the demands presented in verse 23 and commits life to Christ will experience eternal life. Serving is a large part of this. Rejecting selfishness and self-absorption, Jesus' follower chooses the less-traveled road of selfless service for Him and thus experiences life to the fullest.

Gaining even the whole world is infinitely less valuable than one's eternal destiny in relation to God. Being ashamed of Jesus means to deny any link with him and is opposite of acknowledging him as one's Lord and teacher. Luke emphasizes the glory of Jesus. The phrase 'some standing here' refers to Peter, John and James who will witness the transfiguration.