

LIFEGROUP STUDY
FOLLOW ME: PICK UP YOUR CROSS
March 28, 2021

LEADER NOTES

OVERVIEW

Welcome back to our LifeGroup study, Follow Me. Jesus' most repeated image of discipleship is "pick up your cross and follow me." It's a call to echo his servant hearted sacrificial love. When we do this, we have the heart of Jesus and the heart of the Father and in this death to our selfishness we discover life in the kingdom. The goal of this week's study is that we would understand this call and be willing to say "yes" to the specific ways Jesus calls us to pick up our cross and follow Him.

ICEBREAKER My Commitment

When I was a young adult, I made a commitment to become a student at a Bible college hundreds of miles away from my home in Ontario. That commitment shaped the direction of my life in some huge ways! **What commitment do you remember making as a teen or young adult? How did that commitment shape your life?**

STUDY

READ Mark 8:34-38

1. On Sunday, Pete talked about what it means to pick up your cross. **How did he define this? How did his teaching help you understand what it means to pick up your cross?**

LEADER NOTE: When you think about the meaning of picking up your cross, it is important to understand what it is not. As we experience the hardships life brings, we should not see them as "just my cross I have to bear." Jesus' call, "pick up your cross" is an invitation to come and die so you might discover true life in Him. There is a lifelong process God does in you, refining you to be more like His Son. Picking up your cross is about saying "yes" to Jesus' call, "come and die to yourself, and find life in Me".

<p>*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who was executed by the Germans three days before the end of World War II, said: "When Jesus Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."</p>
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2. When you first committed your life to follow Jesus, how well do you think you understood this aspect of Jesus' call to "come and die"? **How have you grown in your understanding of this call?**

LEADER NOTE: Like the disciples in Jesus' day, many of us begin our journey by responding to Jesus' invitation, "come and see" (see John 1:35-39). This is the invitation Jesus gives us to get to know Him by spending time with Him. Over time, we grow into His invitation, "come and die". As a leader, share some of your own experiences with how you've grown in your understanding of this call. We are all on a journey and each of our stories is unique. Sharing our stories can help others in our group understand how Jesus is uniquely calling them to pick up their cross.

Three Truths about Picking Up Your Cross

In Jesus' day, His hearers understood what the cross meant. They saw it as a cruel instrument of suffering and death. Today, it can be hard for us to understand what it means to pick up your cross. Let's explore three practical aspects this call.

I. Picking Up Your Cross Hurts

There's no way around it - crucifixion hurts! Although we don't like to suffer, God can use trials and troubles in our life to teach us to depend on Him.

READ: Hebrews 5:8

"Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered." NLT

3. Jesus walked the path of human experience. Through His suffering, the Father taught Him about obedience. **What are some of the ways Jesus suffered here on earth?**

LEADER NOTE: Jesus suffered in many ways here on earth. He fasted and was tempted by Satan for 40 days. He was misunderstood and persecuted by the religious leaders of His day. He was rejected by many. In His final days on earth, He was betrayed, abandoned, jeered, spit on, beaten and crucified. All of these, the author of Hebrews reminds us, were used by the Father to teach Jesus the pathway of obedience through suffering.

READ: Hebrews 12:1-8

4. In this passage, the author challenges us to face our trials in life the same way we would run a race – with endurance. **How can God use our trials to make us more like Jesus?**

LEADER NOTE: There is a “discipline”, a refining process of becoming more like Jesus, that can only happen through the trials we experience. Our trials are a reminder for us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. As we do that, we get to know Him more, this one who is the “Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith.” Jesus is our role model and example. Just as He saw beyond His suffering and focused on the joy on the other side, so we too can look forward to our reward for faithfully following Him.

II. Picking Up Your Cross is a Journey

Rather than one major event, the process of picking up your cross is more often a lifetime journey where God refines us and grows us into the image of His Son, Jesus.

READ: Philippians 3:10-14

5. In this passage, Paul expresses his desire to know Jesus (vs. 10). He goes on to say this is a journey - like a race. **How does Paul’s description of a race help you understand Jesus’ call to pick up your cross?**

LEADER NOTE: Paul uses the analogy of a race to help us understand the Christian journey. He says he has not yet reached the goal, but that he presses on. He runs the race with all of his passion and focus. His goal is the perfection of Jesus. On the way, he forgets what is behind him and he concentrates his energy on what lies ahead, the heavenly prize. Picking up our cross involves an intentional focus on the reason why we do it – to know Christ and become like Him. This will help us see beyond the temporary, and, like Paul, to focus on the eternal.

6. In this passage Paul says, “I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death.” **Why would Paul say that?**

LEADER NOTE: A key part of being joined to Jesus is experiencing what He experienced both in His life and death. As believers, we share in both Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul knew the pathway to being raised to life in Jesus meant being crucified with Him (see Gal. 2:19-20).

7. The Apostle Paul was 32 years old when God called him to follow Jesus. He began his missionary activity at age 49. God worked on Paul 17 years before He set him free to minister. **How does this speak to you about God's process and timing in your life?**

LEADER NOTE: God's refining process in us takes time, often longer than we imagine. Over our lifetime, God works in us to shape us to be more like His Son. This is His sovereign work and plan, which means we can relax and trust Him.

III. God Transforms Us Through the Cross

Transformation is God's work, not ours. We don't have to worry about or try to figure out when God will do His work in our lives. We just need to be willing to say "yes" when He does.

READ: Romans 12:1

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." NLT

8. **Why would God choose the image of a sacrifice to help us see how He works in us?**

LEADER NOTE: This image of a sacrifice points back to Jesus, the One who sacrificed Himself for us. A sacrifice is an offering of worship to God. Like Jesus, we can offer ourselves to God's plan and purpose for our lives. Our job is to offer ourselves. God's job is to take our offering and use it for His glory.

READ: Philippians 1:6

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns." NLT

9. **How does this verse assure us of God's work in our lives?**

LEADER NOTE: This verse is an awesome reminder that the same God who began His good work in us will continue that work until it is complete. God takes the initiative to work his

salvation in us, so He can be trusted to continue that work of changing us into the likeness of His Son. (see Romans 8:29)

“Since we are all different, and need different processing, He custom designs the plan that he will use with us. Some need more processing than others. Some he simply needs to bend. Others he must break. The amount of processing is often a reflection of the work that he has for us to accomplish in the Kingdom. Some are called to be martyred in Pakistan. Others are called to take care of babies in the church nursery. Obviously, both are needed. However, how he applies the cross to one group will be different from how he applies the cross to another.”
Dr. Roger Barrier

10. God has a unique plan for each of us which includes unique ways He calls us to pick up our cross. **How has today’s study help you understand His plan for your life?**

*Many of the quotes and ideas for today’s study are adapted from Dr. Roger Barrier’s article, “What it Means to Take Up Your Cross: And How to Do It.”

PRAYER

This week, let’s pray for our upcoming Easter weekend services at Creekside.

- Good Friday. Ask God to use the service to speak to hearts about why Jesus had to die and how his death impacts their lives.
- Easter Sunday. Ask God to provide the volunteers we need as we offer our first Sunday service in over a year. Kids ministry and tech are areas of particular need.
- Easter Sunday. Ask God to use the Easter Sunday service to encourage all of us of what Jesus’ resurrection means for us. Ask Him to draw seekers to hear this teaching. May lives be changed for Him this Easter!