



*THIS QUESTION
IS FOR
YOU*

WILL YOU FOLLOW ME?

2023-03-12

Leader Notes

OVERVIEW:

Welcome back to our series, 'This Question is FOR YOU"! In this series we are exploring 4 questions Jesus asks us. These questions Jesus asks are designed to get us thinking about who Jesus is and how we can follow him well. Today's question is - "Will you follow me?" In Mark 8:34, Jesus makes a radical call on us. It's challenging. It's all encompassing. It's dramatic. He says, "If anyone would follow me they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." This is an invitation to come and die. It's an invitation to go all in when it comes to following Jesus. It's not for the faint of heart. But as far as Jesus is concerned it is the most freeing and fulfilling way to live. Do you believe Jesus? Will you fully follow him as he asks?

ICEBREAKER: If I Could Save One Thing

Imagine your home is on fire. You have opportunity to retrieve one thing from your home before it all burns. Assuming people and pets are saved already, what is one thing from your home you would go after? Share with your group about the one thing you would save!

STUDY:

“Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction and harmony to every other area of our life.”

Dallas Willard - Renovation of the Heart

For today’s study we’re going to focus in on Mark chapter 8 where Jesus calls on us to follow him fully and relentlessly. This call teaches us about the value of our soul. As you read Jesus’ words, think about how valuable you are to God. Consider the value of your soul and how you can be intentional about living a life that says - “It is well with my soul.”

READ: Mark 8:34-38

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Mark 8:34-38 ESV

- In vs. 34 Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

1. What does it mean to “come after” Jesus?

LEADER NOTE: In Jesus’ day, rabbis were respected teachers of Jewish law and religion. In the Jewish tradition of Jesus’ days, boys would aspire to learn from and become like their rabbi. To “come after” involved learning from the rabbi (head knowledge) as well as becoming like (character formation) their rabbi. To “come after” our rabbi, Jesus, is to learn his teachings and live by them, also to discover the way Jesus lived, his values and priorities, and seek to become like him. The words “come after” are from the same Greek word as later translated in this passage as “follow”.

2. “... let them deny themselves...” What do you think Jesus meant by this?

LEADER NOTE: The dictionary of Bible Themes defines self-denial as “the willingness to deny oneself possessions or status, in order to grow in holiness and commitment to God.” The Apostle Paul exemplifies this in Philippians 3:7-8 when he says, 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. ESV. To deny myself means giving up the idea that I am the centre of the universe and orienting my life around the lordship of Jesus. You have to deny yourself to follow someone else. You cannot follow two different people going in two different directions.

3. “... take up his cross and follow me.” What might it look like for us to “take up the cross” of Jesus?

LEADER NOTE: In Jesus’ day the cross meant a tortuous death. Taking up the cross meant you were headed to death and you would likely be ridiculed and mocked along the way. Taking up the cross today means dying to our self (our self-focused life) and choosing instead to live for Jesus. Taking up our cross involves being willing to sacrifice all that our flesh cries out for in order to follow our Saviour. It can also mean being prepared to suffer and die, as many followers of Jesus have experienced throughout time and even today in certain parts of the world.

- To deny yourself and carry your cross could be a freeing way to live. How might that be?

LEADER NOTE: God tells us in the Bible that before Jesus, we were slaves to sin. (see Romans 6:19) but when we become a follower of Jesus we become a “slave” to God. We are no longer slaves to sin. We deny our fleshly desire for anything that leads us away from God’s best for us. To be God’s slave is to embrace freedom. Slavery to God produces holiness and this holiness gives us eternal life. (see Romans 6:20-23).

Four “For”s (Mark 8:35-38).

In Mark 8:35-38 we read the word “for” at the beginning of four statements Jesus makes. These statements immediately follow Jesus’ call for us to follow him. Why is giving up our lives for Jesus worth it? Here’s what Jesus tells us.

35 For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.

4. What does Jesus mean by, “ ... whoever would save his life will lose it ...”?

LEADER NOTE: In John 12:23-25 Jesus said, 23“²³The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” NIV To love our life or save our life is to live for this life in the here and now. We attempt to save our life when we reject Jesus’ call to die to ourselves and instead live a life centered on ourselves. When we do this we give up the life Jesus has for us in exchange for temporary pleasures. It’s a bad exchange.

5. What analogy or word picture might you use to better understand this idea of saving yourself?

LEADER NOTE: One example of a powerful picture is from the movie Titanic. In this movie, while the ship is going down, the crew loads women and children in lifeboats to lower them to safety. One cowardly man hops into a lifeboat in the last seconds while it is being lowered. He has saved his life but has he really? In the “saving” of his life he has really made himself less of what he was called to be (courageous, self-sacrificing).

36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

6. What do you think Jesus meant by this? How else might you word this idea?

LEADER NOTE: There is nothing worth more than your soul. Imagine a scales with everything the world has to offer on one side (money, fame, pleasure, power, etc) and your soul on the other. Your soul would tip the scales! If a person rejects God and becomes the richest, most powerful person on earth, they still have made a bad decision. THE MESSAGE paraphrase puts it this way - “What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?”

37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?

7. What does this question tell you about the value of your soul?

LEADER NOTE: Jesus is asking a rhetorical question here. “What can a man give in return for his soul?” Nothing! There is no sum of earthly material value we can come up with to equal the value of your soul. Why is this true? Everything on earth is temporary, but your soul will live forever.

“The most important thing in your life is not what you do but who you become. That’s what you will take with you into eternity. You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.” Dallas Willard

- What do you think of the statement - “The most important thing in your life is not what you do but who you become.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How does this statement factor into the value of your soul?

38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation ...”

8. What does it mean to be ashamed of Jesus?

LEADER NOTE: To be ashamed of someone is to be embarrassed to be seen with them or associated with them, to try to keep others from knowing we have anything to do with that person. Being ashamed of Jesus means we don’t want others to know we follow him and have chosen to live for him.

“... of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

9. What does Jesus mean by this?

LEADER NOTE: There is a day coming when Jesus will return to earth in all his glory. At that time he will judge each person who has ever lived regarding what they have done with him. Jesus’ words to us here are an important reminder that our choice about him today impacts our eternity. One day we will stand before God to give an account for what we have done with our soul.

10. **READ** this quote from Dallas Willard about the soul:

“Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction and harmony to every other area of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature; and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, and the rest of human nature and nature at large.” Dallas Willard - Renovation of the Heart

- How does this image of your soul being a stream help you understand the value of your soul?
- Imagine yourself as the keeper of the stream (your soul), with the responsibility to keep it pure and fresh. How you be intentional in your role as the keeper of the stream?

PRAY:

Watch this video (or listen) to this hymn together - It is Well With My Soul

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbNm_Kdez8o

Spend some time thanking God that it is well with your soul.