

LESSON EIGHT

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

[Jesus] said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

MARK 8:34 NKJV



REFLECTION

It's easy to set lofty goals that are forgotten in the heat and drudgery of preparation. Many people are champions in their minds, but far fewer pay the debt of grueling training and loneliness that precede glory. Think of a time when your involvement in an activity required significant discipline or sacrifice. What aspects of your life did this affect? What did you learn about yourself in the process?

SITUATION

Leading up to Jesus' teaching in this passage, Peter had declared to the Lord, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29). This was followed by Jesus' first prediction of his death (see verses 31–33). The contrast upset and confused the disciples. How could Christ die? The Messiah was expected to lead Israel into a new age of freedom and power. But Jesus made it clear their trust had to be focused on him, not on the current popular expectations of the Messiah's mission.

OBSERVATION

Read Mark 8:34–38 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will

lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

³⁴ When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

EXPLORATION

1. According to Jesus, what is the cost of true discipleship? What is required?

2. How do some people react when they learn that being a true follower of Jesus is costly?

3. What is your reaction to the cost of true discipleship?

4. What does it mean to lose your life for Christ's sake?

5. What does it mean to gain the whole world?

6. What does it mean to be "ashamed" of Jesus and his words? What is Jesus calling his followers to do in this passage?

INSPIRATION

The pole of power is greasy. The Roman emperor Charlemagne knew that. An interesting story surrounds the burial of this famous king. Legend has it that he asked to be entombed sitting upright in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was AD 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome.

The crown was tilted, the mantle moth-eaten, the body disfigured. But open on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested—the Bible. One bony finger pointed to Matthew 16:26: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"

You can answer that one. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. In what ways are you trying to deny yourself and take up your cross?

8. Think of a time when you wanted to hide the fact that you were a Christian. What made you want to keep quiet?

9. How should a Christian's life be different from a non-Christian's life?

10. What do you need to change to be a true disciple of Christ?

11. What is the reward for the person who follows the commands given by Jesus?

12. What is the difference between denying self and self-denial?

LIFE LESSONS

The challenges that Jesus presented in the Gospels still interrupt our lives. *Denying, losing, dying*—these are not the standards the world around us uses for successful living. We're trained to avoid such sacrifices, to look out for ourselves. But Jesus stands before us without apology and asks, "Is there anything you value more highly than me?" We may have a difficult time answering that question, but only an honest answer will do.

DEVOTION

Father, you have given us such a great promise: the promise of salvation. Forgive us when we sometimes put more hope in the things of this earth than in the incredible promises of your heaven. Help us to know today what it means to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and truly follow wherever you may lead us.

JOURNALING

In what ways are you living for yourself rather than for Christ? What do you plan to do about this situation?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Mark during this twelve-part study, read Mark 8:1–38. For more Bible passages about living for God, read Matthew 4:18–21; 5:14–16; Luke 12:13–21; 12:29–33; John 12:25, 26; 13:5–17.