

Followed

Jesus calls people to faithfully follow Him.

MARK 8:31–9:1

While the game “Follow the Leader” might have been entertaining to play in one’s childhood, most adults would rather be the one who is in charge. Our sense of self-autonomy may be challenged by a request from a leader to follow them. At the very least, we prefer a neutral position. When given the options to “lead, follow, or get out of the way,” some would choose the latter.

- In which role would you prefer to serve—leader or follower?
What fears arise when someone asks you to follow them?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


MARK 8:22–9:13

Jesus’s healing of the blind man at Bethsaida varied from the normal pattern. It was a two-step healing in which the man initially had partial sight restored (Mark 8:22-26). What was true of him physically was true spiritually of the disciples. Their understanding of Jesus and His mission was fragmented, in need of completion.

The question Jesus asked His disciples in verse 27 did not greatly differ from the one He asked the blind man in verse 23. “What do you see?” and “What do you say?” are related. One’s level of spiritual perception determines one’s viewpoint about Jesus. After asking what popular opinion was about Him, Jesus asked the disciples to state their position. Peter’s response was, “You are the Christ.”

Six days after Peter’s confession and Jesus’s instruction about His death and resurrection, He took His three closest disciples and went up a mountain. Perhaps after the startling revelation by Jesus of His coming suffering, He wanted to bring encouragement and perspective to the minds of Peter, James, and John. The elements of the transfiguration (mountain, cloud, and brightness) all appear in the Old Testament in connection with divine revelation.

Nevertheless, the disciples struggled to understand after Jesus commanded them to keep silent until after His resurrection. Instead of asking about that subject, they asked Him a question about the prophet Elijah, whom they had seen appear on the mountain. After all, they reasoned, wasn’t he to appear physically, not just in a vision, before the Messiah would come? Jesus assured them that the prophecy was correct, referring to John the Baptist and his martyrdom. As He had told them previously, there was suffering and pain ahead in his own future as the Son of God. John’s ministry was to point to Jesus, and his own persecution foretold that which awaited Jesus (9:2-13).

 **Read Mark 8:31–9:1. What examples do you find that describe or illustrate what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? What examples do you find that represent a failure of that disciple?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GET BEHIND (MARK 8:31-33)

³¹ Then he began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and rise after three days. ³² He spoke openly about this. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning around and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”

VERSE 31

As a follow up to Peter’s confession of Him as the Messiah, Jesus began to instruct the disciples about what that entailed. The verb **teach** shows us this didn’t happen on a single occasion but on multiple occasions. This passage is but one of the three “passion” passages we find in the Gospel of Mark (see also 9:31; 10:33-34).

While the disciples were expecting a Messiah who would come and set up an earthly kingdom, Jesus taught them the opposite of what they were expecting. He told them that many things were going to happen to Him and that it was all necessary because it was in God’s ultimate plan. He named three different groups of people that would reject Him: the **elders**, **chief priests**, and **scribes**.

It wasn’t simply that He would **suffer many things** but rather **it was necessary** for Him to do so. The greatest need for every person is to be forgiven. Our greatest problem is a sin problem. On any level, human or divine, someone must pay for forgiveness to occur. Only Jesus was worthy to become the sacrifice for our salvation. And to do so, He had to suffer death by crucifixion.

That death would not be the end of the story of Jesus Christ because He would **rise after three days** from death. We can surmise that the disciples were so rocked by Jesus’s prediction of His death that neither could they grasp His resurrection. Six days later, they still hadn’t wrapped their minds around it (9:9).

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Luke 19:10; Philippians 2:5-11.)

VERSES 32-33

There was no attempt made by Jesus to soften the offensive nature of His discourse. He **spoke openly** about His earthly outcome. He provided detailed information about what would happen to Him and held nothing back from His disciples.


Peter did not like what he heard Jesus say. He **took him aside and began to rebuke him**. The verb *rebuke* is a strong word. Mark used it to describe Jesus casting out a demon (1:25) and commanding the wind to cease during a violent storm (4:39). Peter did not understand the necessity of Jesus dying for the redemption of humanity.

The audacity of Peter's presumption with Jesus is startling. What, we might ask, would ever cause Peter to think that he had any right to speak to Jesus in this manner? And while we wag our fingers at him in disapproval, we might do well to see if any of this spirit dwells in us. Peter's problem was that he had his own agenda, and it didn't include suffering, rejection, and hardship. To some degree, his following of Jesus was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Could it be that we too at times seek to use Him in the same way? Our response to suffering and hardship for Jesus's sake might expose how much of this attitude lives within us as well.

Jesus rebuked Peter—and probably the other disciples as well. To say to Peter, **Get behind me**, may have indicated that Peter was not truly following Jesus at that moment. What are we to make of Jesus's labeling of Peter as **Satan**? The devil had already demonstrated his attempts to dissuade Jesus from embracing suffering and death as the means to redemption. Satan consistently tried to tempt Jesus to bypass the cross, and Peter's rebuke followed this pattern.

“Faithfully following Jesus requires us to view life from a higher perspective.”

Peter was **not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns**. Faithfully following Jesus requires us to view life from a higher perspective. If we don't have that perspective, we too then have to get back in the proper position of following Jesus instead of trying to dictate to Him.

 **Why was it important for Jesus to set Peter straight when it came to understanding the necessity of the crucifixion and resurrection?**

FOLLOW ME (MARK 8:34-38)

³⁴ Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. ³⁶ For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? ³⁷ What can anyone give in exchange for his life? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

VERSE 34

It was immensely important for Peter and the disciples to understand the cost of Jesus’s mission as the Messiah; without this knowledge they would not understand the cost for themselves to *follow after* Jesus. Not only did Jesus want the disciples to know, but He also called *the crowd* to hear this message that set forth the conditions of discipleship.

“The spirit of this age is ‘me-ism.’”

First, following Jesus required a person to *deny himself*. Sometimes the best way to understand a description like this is to look at its opposite. Peter’s arrogant presumption of trying to bend Jesus to his own will is the exact opposite of what denying oneself looks like. However, this wasn’t just an ancient phenomenon. The spirit of this age is “me-ism,” promoting self, seeking to enrich self, and finding self-fulfillment apart from God. The remedy is discipleship.

Secondly, Jesus taught that following Him required a person to *take up his cross*. Sadly, this crucial condition has been reduced to bearing a particular burden in life: “Oh, that’s just his (or her) cross to bear in life.” Certainly, there are hardships each must endure, but Jesus wasn’t simply describing a cantankerous family member or a physical ailment. Carrying a cross was what the condemned did on their way to their own execution. A cross was an instrument of death, and a disciple of Jesus has died to the assertion of their own agenda.

A contemporary equivalent of the cross would be the electric chair or death by lethal injection. Just as we would be shocked if a religious leader or organization cast expectations in terms of those methods, so Jesus’s original hearers would have reacted strongly to the vivid picture that Jesus painted.

How can a person deny self?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar commands.*

List the three actions that Jesus commanded in Mark 8:34. Review the follow passages: Matthew 7:13-14; 10:34-38; Mark 1:17-18; Luke 9:57-62. What additional insight do you gain from these passages about what it means to follow Jesus?

VERSE 35

Mark could have used the Greek word *bios* for *life*. This would have meant that Jesus was talking about our biological or physical life. Instead, the word is *psyche*, from which we get the word “psychology,” which is the study of the self. The focus of Jesus here was the life we have which is related to, but also separate from, our bodies. It is our sense of self, our identity, who we see ourselves to be.

There is a great paradox expressed here. Those who seek to give their life meaning through their own efforts and attainments will eventually end up in a meaningless existence, with no sense of who they really are or what truly matters. However, those who find their significance in Jesus and His mission instead of a self-centered pursuit of fulfillment receive that and much more. By “dying” to our own agendas and denying the effectiveness of our own attempts to make life meaningful, we discover true life in Jesus.

VERSES 36-37

There are many different “gains” in life, with possessions being a primary example of what people often pursue. Others include power, approval, and comfort. These are the false gods that many people love more than God. You can strive for those things, but they will not give you a life and an identity, a sense of self.

Jesus asserted this by asking the crowd a probing question: ***what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?*** The world around us seeks to convince us that we can have a secure life and identity if we will only give ourselves to its idols. That is a false promise because none of those things apart from God last. An identity built on following after the approval of other people or a comfortable existence is doomed because those things are fragile and temporal. Jesus also asked, ***what can anyone give in exchange for his life?*** He assumed a negative answer to the question. We try to exchange our performance for the things we think will save us but the trade falls through. All idols betray us at some point, and we're left with empty hands created from empty promises.

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VERSE 38

To be ***ashamed*** of someone or something is more than simple embarrassment. It is to see them or it as being unworthy or inadequate. As He talked about following Him, Jesus revealed that we could ultimately trust in Him and not be disappointed. To faithfully follow Him is a response to His faithfulness. To love other gods, which is what an ***adulterous and sinful generation*** does, is a value decision about His trustworthiness. Based on that valuation, Jesus will make His own valuation ***when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels***. Simply stated, if we are ashamed of Jesus, one day He will be ashamed of us.



How does losing one's life make it possible to find true life?

SEE HIS POWER (MARK 9:1)

¹Then he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power.”

VERSE 1


Jesus continued with a succinct but authoritative statement about **the kingdom of God**. His first sermon (1:14-15) addressed the subject, and it continued to be a major theme throughout His ministry, appearing fourteen times in Mark's Gospel. This kingdom was both "already and not yet." Jesus spoke of it as a present reality that would have a greater fulfillment in the future.

He stated that some standing in the crowd would not experience death until they saw God's power revealed in the coming of His kingdom. Since the disciples were present along with the crowd, we can include them as those who heard Jesus's words and were included in their possible fulfillment. Six days later after Jesus spoke this, He took Peter, James, and John up on a mountaintop and there the miraculous transfiguration of Jesus occurred in which they saw the glory of Christ revealed (9:2-8). That event can be understood as an anticipation and foretaste of God's kingdom at Christ's second coming.

However, the possibility should be considered that some in the crowd that day later witnessed the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. He appeared to believers other than the apostles (1 Cor. 15:6), and it is possible that some who heard these words of Jesus were part of that group of over 500 disciples.

The promise of Jesus was that some would **see** God's kingdom be revealed **in power**. To see both Elijah and Moses, two Old Testament heroes of faith, was a prefiguration of the resurrection itself. The ultimate proof and revelation of God's power came through the resurrection of Jesus, witnessed by the apostles and other believers.

What about today? Can we see the kingdom of God come in power? When we faithfully follow Jesus, God works in power through us. Even though our impact may take place quietly and without fanfare, it is nevertheless a valid and important demonstration of the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus will someday witness the power of God at His coming. Until then, as we yield ourselves to the pursuit of God's agenda above our own, we can be confident that He will work powerfully through us.

 **Why might the promise of seeing God's power excite some and frighten others?**

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers follow a Savior who willingly died and was resurrected for their salvation.
- + Believers find life by following Christ's agenda.
- + Believers can live in anticipation of seeing God's power.

○ Discuss as a group how God is revealing His power through you collectively. Point to specific examples of the Holy Spirit at work in your midst. Ask what collective adjustments might be made to facilitate an even greater impact.

○ What does "carrying the cross" look like in your life on a day-to-day basis? In what ways have you given up some of your plans to be able to pursue Christ's mission in the world?

PRAYER NEEDS