



HEROES OF THE FAITH
JIM ELLIOT: HE IS NO FOOL
MATTHEW 16:24-28

MAIN IDEA

Believers must accept what kind of life they will live to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

There are times in all our lives when we hear an invitation to be part of something that turns out vastly different than we imagined it would. Maybe you thought being part of that team or committee was going to be fun and it was way more hard work than you expected. You may have volunteered to help with something at church thinking it would be a certain way, but the reality was quite the opposite. Truthfully, we probably all have a story of our expectations being completely different than reality.

- **Share an instance where your expectations turned out to be very different than the reality.**

 - **How does it make you feel to be surprised by what is expected of you after you've committed?**

 - **Why do you think it is important to know in advance what will happen if you choose a certain role or position?**
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UNDERSTANDING

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

> **Have someone in your group read Matthew 16:24.**

Jesus laid it all on the line for His followers. He knew there were some who had different or even unreal expectations for what it meant to follow Him. To eliminate confusion, Jesus was very specific and direct about the requirements to be His disciple.

He listed three things we must do to if we want to be His disciple and they are not easy. Jesus knew the reality of suffering that was coming His way and did not want His disciples to be unprepared for how they too would suffer. If we are convinced that being a Christ follower is easy, that is not the case and will cause disillusionment and frustration. Jesus knew that and desired all who came after Him to know the truth.

Look at the three directives in verse 24: deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me. Our human nature longs to give in to everything our flesh wants. By calling for self-denial, Jesus challenged us to be more focused on the Spirit within us than our own flesh. Taking up our figurative cross points back to what Jesus did with the physical cross yet also represents the path God has placed each of us on. We are to live the life ordained by God with the burdens that come with it just as Jesus did. As we follow Him, He equips us to handle all that comes our way in the same manner as our Savior.

- **How does it help you live the Christian life to know what Jesus expects of you?**

- **How is this teaching from Jesus counter cultural to what you see and hear from the world?**

- **Which of these three directives from Jesus do you struggle with most and why?**

> Have someone in your group read Matthew 16:25-26.

- **Which comparison from these verses stands out to you most? Why?**
- **Why do you think Jesus made these comparisons right after giving the expectations of a disciple?**

Having laid out the requirements to be His disciple, Jesus then offered the motivation to do difficult things. To make the wise choice to deny self, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, we need to look beyond this life and consider eternity. These verses compare and contrast to show the different mindset a believer should have compared to the world. Although these statements go against common thought, the paradox of the cross is central to faith in Christ.

The concept of losing your life by seeking to save it and finding your life by losing it for Jesus's sake is foundational. Think about it like a seed that has to be planted and die to grow into what it is ultimately designed to be. Only by dying to self (the seed) can you grow into the life God has for you (the plant).

Jesus also warned that if our main goal is to gain the world and what the world says is important then we run the risk of losing our very soul. Though the world applauds people who gain great material success, God looks at the heart of a person. Think about what it means to be willing to give away your own life as being others-centered instead of self-centered. When we live in a way that focuses more on how God wants to use us to reach other people than

amassing our fortunes, we follow the example of Jesus. People like Jim Elliot, Lottie Moon, and other faith-filled men and women show us more examples of what it is to live like Jesus without regard for our own comfort.

- **How have you experienced the truth that if you seek to save your life you will lose it and by losing your life for Jesus's sake you will find it?**

- **How is it possible to gain the whole world yet lose your own soul?**

- **Who else can you name beside Jim Elliot or Lottie Moon that you have seen live as an example of being others-centered for the sake of the gospel?**

> Have someone in your group read Matthew 16:27-28.

Jesus continued His teaching with the reminder of what His future held and who holds the future. He alluded to the second coming and the rewards that will be given to His faithful followers. This return of Jesus is another motivator to help His disciples see the benefit of living as He has called us.

When we realize that this life is not all there is and eternity is affected by the choices we make today, we tend to be more willing to do things Jesus told us like deny self, take up our cross, and follow Him. This gives us perspective and encourages right living because those rewards are based on our works that flow from our faith.

The truth that how we live our lives today will determine the rewards we may or may not receive in eternity can be a positive influence on the choices we make and keep us from losing our souls as Jesus warned. When we choose to follow Jesus, we will not always have it easy as we can see from observing the lives of individuals like Jim Elliot, who laid down their lives for

the sake of the gospel. However, any who have gone on to see the glory of Jesus firsthand would undoubtedly say that the rewards far outweigh the cost when we choose to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

- **How does the truth that Jesus is coming back encourage you when life is tough?**
- **What motivates you to make right choices today in obeying the commands of Jesus?**
- **How does knowing that rewards are coming, according to our works, help you make godly choices?**
- **Name some benefits that come from keeping an eternal perspective.**

APPLICATION

- **Prayerfully evaluate your own recent choices to determine where you need to make changes so that you are working toward eternal rewards and not selfish gain.**
- **Identify one way God is calling you to pick up your cross and carry it as Jesus did; take action in this regard.**
- **Which do we need to work on the most: denying self, carrying our cross, or following Jesus? How can we get better this week?**

PRAY

Thank Jesus for giving clear instruction on what it takes to be a true disciple of His. Ask for strength and wisdom to live like Jesus in all things.

MATTHEW 16:24-28

16:24. These teachings followed immediately upon the heels of the interchange between Peter and Jesus. Peter's statement demanded another mentoring session. Many people wanted to follow Jesus, but most wanted to do it on their own terms. Jesus said that only those who followed on his terms could be disciples. And they would be rewarded for their loyalty. **Notes:**

Jesus defined a true follower in three ways. All three verbs he used are third-person imperatives in the Greek language, for which there is no exact English translation. The closest we can come to a proper translation is "let him," but even this is not forceful enough. He must carry the force of the commands.

First, the true follower must deny himself. The New Testament writers commonly used the verb *arneomai* to mean "say not, deny" (notably in Matt. 10:33). However, the emphatic verb *aparneomai*, "to deny utterly," is used only by the four Gospel writers, and then almost exclusively in the quotes parallel to this one (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial (Matt. 26:34–35; Mark 14:30–31; Luke 22:34; John 13:38), and Peter's actual denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61).

This verb is reserved to convey only the most conclusive denial. To deny oneself with this depth of denial is to live without a single thread of self-centered thought, devoted exclusively to Jesus and his work. Jesus was not saying that we need to create pain or deprivation for ourselves, but that we need to be prepared to let go of anything that competes with his kingdom.

Second, a devoted follower must take up his cross (see comment on 10:38). In this context, this phrase takes on new significance. In 10:38, Jesus used this phrase to clarify the follower's commitment in the context of the disciples' ministry training. Here he used it for much the same purpose, but with the shadow of his own cross drawing closer (Matt. 20:20–23).

Third, the true disciple must follow me (see comment on 10:38). Jesus commanded his disciples to follow him in 4:19, but the suffering that went with such following was not clarified until Jesus' statement in 10:38, where follow me comes after take up his cross. Again, this time the command was more ominous than ever. The disciples were being challenged to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, and then on to their own "crosses."

Notes:

16:25–26. This paradoxical statement is almost identical to that in 10:39. The most important difference is the substitution of the verb save in the place of find. The meaning is very similar, but stronger here, with save and lose implying the higher possibility of physical death.

Jesus was talking about saving one's life. But his focus was on life's fulfillment in the next world. His point was profound. If a disciple spent all his energy focusing on this life here and now, he would lose the entire point of this life, which is investing in the life to come. And the difference between the two is the Messiah-King's cause. If the disciple tries to protect his life for himself in this life, he squanders the opportunity to increase his reward in the life that really matters—the eternal kingdom.

If a person does not accept the challenge of true discipleship, he will forfeit both true quality life now and full reward in eternity. There are no gains if a person wastes this life on himself. Matthew 16:27 confirms the subject here to be rewards rather than deliverance from hell.

16:27. Jesus then explained the wisdom of following and accepting the suffering and loss implicit in following him. Using the title the Son of Man in eschatological, messianic sense, Jesus foretold the day when all the losses of his obedient followers would be abundantly compensated. In contrast to his first coming to earth in humility, the next coming would

be in his Father's glory with his angels. Now he has come as the sacrificial Son of Abraham; then he will come as the sovereign Son of David.

Notes:

Although Jesus' intention in the context of Matthew 16 was to give hope to his followers, the word reward does include the "repayment" or judgment of those works that do not honor Christ. Each person does not mean only those disciples who will be rewarded, but also those who seek the world and end up forfeiting their lives (Col. 3:23–25). Therefore, "repay" or "recompense" is a preferable translation over "reward."

The repayment will be according to what he had done. Christ was seeking to motivate his followers to work hard and invest their lives for eternity. Scripture makes it very clear that there are differing degrees of reward for believers, based on their stewardship of life opportunities (Matt. 25:14–30; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23–25; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12). In 2 Timothy 2:10–13, the apostle Paul summed up the basis of the disciple's reward as endurance.

16:28. Jesus grabbed his disciples' attention with another, I tell you the truth. Since the conversation on suffering and death may have been overwhelming to the disciples, Jesus assured them that some of those standing here would not taste death until they had seen firsthand the power of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Jesus assured his followers that their suffering would not be without purpose or hope. They would be the tools the king would use to bring about the growth of his kingdom over the next few explosive decades. Such growth would be impossible without followers who were willing to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus through their own dark valleys.