

5-Day Devotional: The Cost of Following Jesus

Luke 9:23–26

Day 1 — “Deny Yourself”

Read: Luke 9:23–24; Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1–2

Choosing to follow Jesus begins with a surprising command: *deny yourself*. It’s not the motivational slogan our culture puts on coffee mugs. But Jesus doesn’t invite us into self-improvement—He invites us into a new way of life.

Self-denial isn’t moral misery. It’s surrender. It’s choosing Jesus’ way over my way. It’s laying down the right to run my own life so I can experience the life only He gives.

Most of us don’t struggle with “big” moments of denial. It’s the small, ordinary, Tuesday-morning moments that get us. It’s choosing to forgive when bitterness feels better... choosing purity when temptation is easier... choosing humility when pride is screaming for attention.

Denying ourselves feels like losing—but Jesus says it’s how we find life. When Paul says, “*I have been crucified with Christ*” (Gal. 2:20), he’s not talking about misery; he’s talking about freedom. The freedom that comes when Christ—not our appetites, impulses, or insecurities—sets the direction of our lives.

If something in your life is fighting for the throne, today is the day to hand the keys back to Jesus. The One who calls you to deny yourself is the One who gave Himself for you.

Reflection Questions:

1. What’s one area of my life where “my way” has been winning over Jesus’ way?
2. Why is surrender so difficult for me?
3. Where have I experienced life on the other side of obedience before?

Application:

Identify one practical habit, attitude, or pattern you need to surrender to Christ today. Tell someone so they can pray with you.

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to deny myself—not out of guilt, but out of love for You. Help me surrender what I’ve been holding onto and trust that Your way is better. Shape my desires so they align with Your will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 2 — “Take Up Your Cross Daily”

Read: Luke 9:23; 1 Peter 2:21–24; Philippians 3:7–10

When Jesus said to *take up your cross*, His listeners didn’t think of jewelry or wall décor. The cross was a symbol of death—death to the old way of life, death to the idols that used to define us, death to the belief that we belong to ourselves.

But Jesus adds a crucial word: *daily*. Following Jesus isn’t a one-time, emotional decision. It’s an ongoing, everyday, in-the-grind kind of faith. Cross-bearing happens in traffic, in conflict, in suffering, in temptation, and in the hidden places nobody sees.

Cross-bearing is choosing obedience when it costs you something. It’s speaking truth when silence would be safer. It’s loving people who are hard to love. It’s turning away from sin when everything in you screams to indulge. It’s saying, “Not my will, but Yours.”

This daily cross is not punishment—it’s formation. It shapes you into someone who looks more like Jesus. As Peter writes, “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.*”

The Christian life isn’t about avoiding discomfort. It’s about becoming like Christ. And cross-bearing is the path.

Reflection Questions:

1. What feels hardest to surrender daily?
2. How does the idea of “daily” obedience challenge me?
3. Where is Jesus calling me to imitate Him today?

Application:

Choose one concrete act of obedience today—something small, costly, and unseen. Offer it to Jesus as worship.

Prayer:

Lord, give me strength to take up my cross today. Help me choose obedience when it’s uncomfortable and trust You when it’s costly. Make me more like Christ in my attitudes, choices, and desires. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 3 — “Follow Me”

Read: Luke 9:23; John 10:27–28; 1 John 2:6

The call of Jesus is beautifully simple: “*Follow Me.*” Not “admire Me.” Not “agree with Me.” Not “like My teachings on social media.”

Follow.

To follow Jesus means to go where He leads, even when the path winds into difficulty. It means submitting your calendars, your decisions, and your relationships to His lordship. It’s trusting that His voice leads to life—even when His path feels narrow.

Jesus isn’t calling us to follow Him from a distance. His sheep hear His voice. They walk closely behind Him. They listen, trust, and obey because they know the Shepherd is good.

Following Jesus means He sets the pace. He sets the priorities. He defines what matters. It requires humility—the kind that says, “Jesus, You know better than I do.”

The beautiful irony? Following Jesus doesn’t restrict you—it frees you. You weren’t made to follow your heart. You were made to follow Him. And the more closely you walk with Him, the more your heart becomes whole.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where am I following Jesus closely, and where am I lagging behind?
2. What voices compete with the Shepherd’s voice in my life?
3. What step of obedience is Jesus calling me to take right now?

Application:

Take one intentional step behind Jesus today—respond to His Word, obey His prompting, or seek His direction before making a decision.

Prayer:

Jesus, teach me to follow You closely. Help me trust Your voice above every other voice in my life. Lead me, guide me, and keep me near. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 4 — “Losing to Gain”

Read: Luke 9:24–25; Matthew 16:26; Philippians 3:7–8

Jesus flips the whole world upside down when He says, “*Whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*”

We spend our lives trying to protect our comfort, our image, our safety, our success. But Jesus tells us that the more we cling to our lives, the more we lose.

Think of all the things the world chases—success, followers, money, influence, applause. None of it lasts. And none of it satisfies. Jesus exposes the tragic irony: you can “win” life in the world’s eyes and completely lose your soul.

The only life you keep is the life you surrender to Jesus.

Paul says he counts everything as loss compared to the worth of knowing Christ. That’s not spiritual hyperbole—it’s clarity. Life comes from Christ alone. And anything that replaces Him becomes a cheap substitute.

Losing your life sounds drastic, but in practice it looks like this:

Letting go of control.

Letting go of sin.

Letting go of applause.

Letting go of idols.

Letting go of the illusion that you know better than Jesus.

You don’t lose anything you truly need. You gain everything you were created for.

Reflection Questions:

1. What am I holding onto that’s keeping me from fully following Jesus?
2. How have I chased “the world” at the expense of my soul?
3. What would it look like to treat Christ as my greatest treasure this week?

Application:

Identify one thing you need to “lose”—a sinful habit, a prideful posture, a comfort you cling to—so that you can gain more of Christ.

Prayer:

Lord, help me loosen my grip on everything that competes with You. Show me where I’m clinging to the world and teach me to treasure Christ above all. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 5 — “Not Ashamed”

Read: Luke 9:26; Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:7–8

Jesus ends His call with a serious warning: “*Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words...*” It’s a sobering reminder that discipleship isn’t private. Following Jesus means standing with Him even when it costs reputation, comfort, or acceptance.

We live in a world where confessing Christ openly can feel awkward or even risky. We fear being misunderstood, labeled, or judged. But Jesus calls us to courage—not bravado, but Spirit-filled boldness.

Being “unashamed” doesn’t mean being loud, abrasive, or obnoxious. It means being faithful. It means refusing to shrink back when Jesus’ name comes up. It means speaking truth with grace. It means living in such a way that people know who your Lord is.

Paul says he is “*not ashamed of the gospel,*” not because he was fearless, but because he knew the power of the One who saved him.

At the end of the day, discipleship isn’t about perfection—it’s about allegiance. You stand with the One who stood for you.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do I feel pressure to hide my faith?
2. What fear keeps me from being bold for Christ?
3. Who in my life needs to hear about the hope I have in Jesus?

Application:

Take one step of unashamed obedience this week—share your faith, pray with someone, or speak openly about Christ where you normally stay silent.

Prayer:

Lord, give me courage to stand with You in every setting. Free me from fear, embarrassment, or hesitation. Let my life reflect Your worth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.