

## THE NEED FOR FREQUENCY

### Luke 9:23

#### INTRODUCTION:

According to a Gallup Survey conducted last spring, “More Americans report exercising at a high frequency every month so far this year compared with 2009. This is a turnaround from last year, when the percentage of Americans who reported exercising frequently was down during each month compared with 2008.”

I am sure it is a good thing that people are exercising more frequently. But I wonder if we are becoming more frequent in our spiritual exercises – exercises like worship attendance, Bible study, prayer, scripture memorization, tithing and so on. To grow to be like Jesus requires daily spiritual exercise. That is part of the lifestyle of a follower of Jesus.

Jesus spoke of that in Luke 9:23. I used this passage for the message two weeks ago and I plan to use it again next Sunday. Today, I want to place the text in its larger context; so would you listen as I read, starting in Luke 9:18.

<sup>18</sup> *Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”*

<sup>19</sup> *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”*

<sup>20</sup> *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

*Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”*

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. <sup>22</sup> And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”*

<sup>23</sup> *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup>*

*What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? <sup>26</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”*

I want to highlight verse 23: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Did you catch that time-related word: “daily”? Jesus said that there are some daily disciplines that his followers must practice if they are serious about coming after him. We are going to look at a few of those that are noted in this passage.

#### I. Spiritual Fitness Requires Daily Denial

Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* If you stop and think about it, you will realize that word "daily" applies to denying yourself as much as it does to taking up your cross and following Jesus. Spiritual fitness requires daily denial.

Do you realize that? It costs something to be a disciple of Jesus. In fact, it costs a lot to follow Jesus? In actual fact, it costs *everything* to follow Jesus...and we pay on the installment plan and the payment must be made every day. If anyone would follow Jesus, he must deny himself daily.

Think of The Twelve apostles who followed Jesus. It cost them something to be disciples. Peter, Andrew, James and John had to leave their fishing boats, their nets, their careers as fishermen, their home, their father and the rest of their family so they could follow Jesus. Totaled up, that is a high price to pay.

Matthew left his lucrative Roman tax business so he could follow Jesus and live the nomadic life of a wanderer.

Simon the Zealot was...a zealot. He was a Jewish fanatic but he had to leave his hyper-religiosity behind to follow a simple carpenter.

Judas Iscariot is thought to have been called that because he was one of the earliest members of the sicarii, a group of assassins among the Jewish rebels who were intent on driving the Romans out of Judea. They were called the sicarii because, under their cloaks, they carried short daggers called sicarii. They carried these daggers so that, if they got the opportunity, they could kill a Roman in a crowd or in an alley or any place where they thought they could get away with it. All of the sicarii had taken a vow to kill as many Romans as they could. But when Judas decided to follow Jesus, he had to leave his violent vows and his terrorist ways behind him so he could walk with the Prince of Peace.

What has it cost you to follow Jesus? Do you remember Bob Tinskey? He wrote the book *God of the Valleys* that we used as our Sunday evening text last year. Mr. Tinskey came from a Jewish household and was raised a Jew. His family expected that he would be an observant Jew. When Bob Tinskey decided to follow Jesus, he not only left the synagogue and Judaism behind, he left much of his family behind. It cost him his familiar faith, his treasured traditions and his family relationships to be a disciple of Jesus.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Daily denial is part of the cost of following

Jesus. What do you deny yourself on a regular basis so you can follow Jesus?

- Do you deny yourself some physical pleasures so you can be spiritually strong?
- Do you deny yourself some material treasures so you can be spiritually rich?
- Do you deny yourself some unhealthy friendships so you can know what it is to have a friend in Jesus?

Following Jesus will cost you something.

- It will cost you some pride because we have to humble ourselves to acknowledge that we are sinners in need of a savior if we want to follow Jesus.
- It will cost you the control of your life. We sing “All to Jesus I Surrender” and it is true that we must surrender all to follow him. Someone has said that becoming a disciple of Jesus is like signing your name to a blank check and then letting Jesus fill in what he wants it to cost you. That, my friends, would be surrendering control to him.
- Following Jesus will cost you some time. You cannot follow Jesus and spend all your time the way you used to. When I hear people say that they can’t come to church because Sunday is the only day they can sleep late, go to the lake, play golf or some other personal pleasure...when I hear someone say something like that, I know that they are not disciples of Jesus. They can’t be because they are unwilling to deny themselves. Following Jesus will cost all of us some time and if you will not give him some, you cannot follow him.
- It will cost you your sin. Are there some sins you are unwilling to forsake so you can be a disciple of Jesus? You must deny yourself your sinning to be a disciple of Jesus.
- But catch this, when you decide to follow Jesus, it will cost you your guilt and your shame. Jesus will take your guilt because he paid the price of your guilt when he died on the cross and if you become his disciple, your account is marked “Paid In Full”. And he will remove your shame and replace it with the joy of forgiveness.
- And the Bible says it will cost you your condemnation. Anyone who sins is under sentence of death because that is the penalty for sin. But for those who are in Christ, there is now no condemnation. Following Jesus has cost them that.

It will cost you to follow Jesus. But that’s OK, it cost him everything for you to follow him.

## II. **Spiritual Fitness Requires Daily Devotion (Lk 9:24)**

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.” Jesus is calling on you to devote your life to him.

Followers of Jesus take up their cross every day. Among the people who heard Jesus say this, there was no confusion about what he meant. They knew what a cross was. It was an instrument of death. The cross had not been a part of their experience until 63 BC. That is when Pompeus (or Pompey) captured Jerusalem and annexed Palestine to Rome.

The Romans did not have much tolerance for those who failed to respect their sovereignty. One way to make sure everyone obeyed the rules was to make a public spectacle of those who were convicted of crimes against the state. The Romans did not invent crucifixion. That dubious honor goes to the Persians who developed this form of capital punishment between 400 and 300 BC. It is quite possibly the most painful form of death ever devised by man.

No, the Romans did not invent crucifixion but they certainly perfected and popularized it. No Jew in occupied Palestine would have lived to be 15 without having seen one or more criminals nailed to a cross. Crucifixions were not conducted in private. The crosses were erected in prominent places so the masses could not miss them. It helped to intimidate the populace. And the more excruciating the experience and the more vocal the victim, the better the Romans liked it. They wanted everyone to know that they should do everything in their power to avoid dying on a cross.

With the image of writhing, contorted, convulsing human flesh clearly in their minds, Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." Shoulder the instrument of your own public humiliation and agonizing death.

The Romans arrested people and forced them to carry their own cross to the place of their execution. But no one forced Jesus to pick up his cross and lay down his life. The Romans may have thought they did but they did not. In John 10:17-18, Jesus said,

*"<sup>17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

He took up his cross and laid down his life because he chose to. And he asks us to choose to do the same thing. He asks us to decide that we will put the old self to death and then receive a new self he will give us. And then he tells us that it is well worth it. In the very next verse in Luke 9, Jesus said, "*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*"

You give a life you cannot keep to receive one you cannot lose. Now how good a deal is that? Jesus calls upon you to devote your life to him just as he devoted his to you.

### **III. Spiritual Fitness Requires Daily Discipleship**

Spiritual fitness requires daily denial, daily devotion and daily discipleship. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me."

Within the church, we throw around the term "disciple" as if we expect that everyone knows what we mean by it. I'm not sure everyone knows. I'm not sure any of us really thinks about what it means to say we are a disciple of Jesus.

Apprenticeship has been defined as, "a system of training a new generation of practitioners of a skill. Apprentices build their careers from apprenticeships. Most of their training is done on the job while working for an employer who helps the apprentices learn their trade, in exchange for their continuing labor for an agreed period after they become skilled."

A person learns to be a bricklayer by being apprentice working first for, later with and eventually as a bricklayer. A person becomes an electrician through a similar apprentice relationship. Most skilled trades and crafts involve apprenticeships.

When I worked for AAA, I began by being trained by a skilled hospitality inspector. I watched Bob work and asked questions. Later, I worked alongside of him and we asked each other questions. In time, I worked while Bob observed me and gave me instructions and suggestions as needed. Then, when he felt I was fully trained, he sent me out into the field to do the work of a hospitality industry inspector.

What a beautiful illustration of discipleship. We learn to walk like Jesus by following him as our Master and learning from him, just as an apprentice follows and learns from the master craftsman. In time, we should be walking just like Jesus walked and working just like Jesus worked. That is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus: we commit ourselves to follow him so we can become like him.

Now people, this is not a once-in-a-while kind of thing. Becoming a master craftsman is not a hobby, it is a lifestyle. It is not something in which an apprentice can merely dabble; it is a daily devotion to his craft and his calling. Being an apprentice to Jesus is exactly the same...but with no days off. If we are not following him daily, we are following him weakly (w-e-a-k-l-y) and weak discipleship is no discipleship at all.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Bible tells us that the day Jesus died, he carried his cross through the packed streets of Jerusalem; that he endured the taunts and jeers of mocking people; that he carried his cross to the place of his death and there he died for you and for me. There is a record of one other condemned man who carried a cross in that grim parade: Simon of Cyrene. Like all the rest of us, Simon was a condemned sinner when he shouldered Christ's cross and walked with him that day.

In one sense of the word, Simon carried his own cross because his sins put Jesus there. So did mine. The question for me...and for you: must Jesus bear the cross alone? The answer: no, there's a cross for everyone. Will you shoulder yours?

**INVITATION:**       #673 – *“Must Jesus Bear The Cross Alone?”*