



Book of Faith Bible Study

Mark 8:34-35

Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

Jesus’ followers are known for their density in the Gospel of Mark, seemingly causing Jesus endless headaches over their inability to fathom what Jesus is telling them. Three times Jesus tries to teach the disciples what true discipleship is. The first time (see Mark 8:34-35), however, Jesus called “the crowd” along with his inner circle. The crowd also needed to hear what true discipleship is.

Why is it significant that “the crowd” needed to learn what true discipleship is? Are you part of “the crowd”?

What Jesus said about true discipleship is like a three-point plan on transforming power. First, Jesus declares that to follow him, people must “deny themselves.” This does not mean that you should deny your bodily needs, your emotions, or your minds. Rather, it means that followers — even those in the big crowd — must *disown* themselves. To disown one’s self means to deny the ego as the locus of power in your life. You are not the center of the universe. Rather, God should be the center of your universe.

Why would you disown yourself? How do you disown yourself? Something must have been a problem that prevented Jesus’ listeners from being true disciples. If disowning yourself is the answer to this problem, what might the problem be? How is the problem that prevented Jesus’ followers from being true disciples present in you? In your community? How can you as an ordinary Christian be a true disciple to Jesus? What stands in your way? How does the message to disown yourself help to solve the crisis?

As you consider opening Scripture individually or with others, you may wish to consider these general questions:

How does the Bible feed your daily life?

How does the Bible feed the life of this community?

How are we renewed, empowered, and enlivened by the Word?

What stands in the way of our opening the Bible and joining the conversation?



Second, Jesus tells his listeners that they must “take up their cross.” This does not mean that to follow Jesus means suffering without protest when you are harmed. Nor does it mean silently bearing abuse or physical pain. Because the cross in ancient Palestine was the instrument of Roman execution for violent criminals, slaves, and rebels of the state, “taking up their cross” meant taking up the consequences of following Jesus Christ. Following Jesus meant living in ways that opposed Roman colonial imperial power and elite religious collusion with that imperial power. Taking up one’s cross meant that someone confronted the worldly power that opposed God’s presence on earth. Often the result was earthly suffering.

If the cross was an instrument of Roman imperial execution for those who were openly adverse to its power, how could we interpret what this cross is in our present context? In other words, what are the threats to you and your community when you live God’s love on earth?

Third, Jesus tells the crowd that they must follow him. Following Jesus also meant that for the sake of the gospel — the good news of God’s love through Jesus Christ — you were willing to die.

Do you want to lose your life for the sake of the gospel?

Following Jesus was counter-cultural. Jesus’ means of ministry were on the margins and often with the marginal. Jesus’ way of political protest was out-of-the-ordinary: he was not the warrior messiah who was expected. Instead, we see that God’s love in Jesus meant that true disciples broke religious barriers between people; healed those who needed healing; and subverted colonial power in order to empower the oppressed. Following Jesus as a true disciple meant that your power would not come from your ego but would come from being grounded in God’s power — God’s power in the world, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

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In addition to questions found in the studies, here are general questions that can be used for each of the texts:

What is God saying to us through this passage?

What does this passage tell us about God?

How does this passage speak to us as individuals and to us as a community?

What does this passage teach us about our neighbors and our world?

Questions on Mark 8:34-35

- *Why is it significant that “the crowd” needed to learn what true discipleship is? Are you part of “the crowd”?*
- *Why would you disown yourself? How do you disown yourself? Something must have been a problem that prevented Jesus’ listeners from being true disciples. If disowning yourself is the answer to this problem, what might the problem be? How is the problem that prevented Jesus’ followers from being true disciples present in you? In your community?*
- *How can you as an ordinary Christian be a true disciple to Jesus? What stands in your way? How does the message to disown yourself help to solve the crisis?*
- *If the cross was an instrument of Roman imperial execution for those who were openly adverse to its power, how could we interpret what this cross is in our present context? In other words, what are the threats to you and your community when you live God’s love on earth?*
- *Do you want to lose your life for the sake of the gospel?*