

Come Die with Me

Leader's Guide

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Sometimes Jesus is really scary.

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

There are few words Jesus ever spoke that are scarier.

Scripture: [Matthew 16:21–28](#)

Based On: "No Wonder They Crucified Him," sermon series by Daniel Meyer, [PreachingToday.com](#).



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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: *At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Read Matthew 16:21–28.

When Jesus explained toward the end of his three years of public ministry that he would have to suffer, die, and be raised to life, Peter rebuked him: “Never, Lord! ... This shall never happen to you!”

What Jesus said in the face of this apparent devotion forces us to define discipleship. Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

There are few words Jesus ever spoke that are scarier. That's particularly true when you contrast them with some of his other invitations. When Jesus says, “Come dine with me,” most of us are pleased to accept. When Christ says, “Come do life with me”—experience the difference my companionship makes—many of us are naturally intrigued. When Jesus says, “Come dance with me”—come experience my joy—it seems like a good deal to follow him.

But when he says, “Come die with me”—come take up a cross with me, come experience my death—there is something in almost all of us that cries out with the apostle Peter, “Never, Lord!” And this is only natural. From the cradle on, we are taught that the goal of life is to preserve it. From the moment we're first strapped into our child safety seats to the day we are lying in a hospital room with tubes in our bodies, the continual message is: Preserve, protect, sustain, secure!

It is not simply the maintenance of life, but its continual maximization that we are taught in America today. From early on, we absorb the message that the quality of one's life is directly related to the quantity of life—the enhancements we have been able to secure. Our lives come to be defined by the titles and trophies we've amassed, the pleasures and privileges we enjoy, and the knowledge and things we've acquired.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Why do you think Jesus reacted so strongly to Peter's words?
- [Q] What do you think it means to take up your cross?
- [Q] How can we lose our life for Jesus? Does that just mean physical death? Explain.

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[Q] In what ways are we in danger of gaining the world but forfeiting our souls?

[Q] What reward is there in giving up our lives for Christ?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Jesus calls us to die.

Jesus tells us that we have defined life too superficially, too selfishly, too stupidly. He looks right into our eyes, as he did the Pharisees', and tells us that we're barely touching life as God intended it. He tells us to get off the fence we've been walking between the world's way and the kingdom's way. He challenges us to complete the circle of grace, and not just demand it for ourselves because we've got a ticket. He calls us to patrol the pleasures we've allowed to invade our perimeter and conquer our hearts. He tells us to check our bags for the anxiety, fear, and anger we've been carrying so long that we don't see how burdened and blocked we still are. Jesus demands that we give outrageous grace to those who wish us harm and seek to take our land.

If we are truly hearing him, then we rightly recognize that the coming of Jesus requires not only his death, but our own. If we are going to follow Jesus through the gate of the kingdom—if we are to be born anew into this life of God—then the way we've been taught to define life, the way we've naturally come at life, the life or self we've become, has to die. It has to be lost. It has to be named and nailed and annihilated. And that will be painful and hard. It will demand something of the profound humility and courageous perseverance we see in Jesus as he carries his cross.

It will mean periods of terrible thirsting for the substances that used to slake our thirst. It will mean times when we'll feel utterly forsaken by God. It will put us in a place of temporary vulnerability before the soldiers and mocking crowds of this world. It will mean cleaving to our spiritual family the way Mary and John were called to by Christ at the cross. It will require a daily commitment of our Spirit into the Father's hands. It means a trusting obedience until God's work in and through us is completed and we can say: "It is finished."

George MacDonald, the great Scottish preacher, wrote:

Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live, but live as he lives—by dying as he died, who died to himself that he might live unto God. If we do not die to ourselves, we cannot live to God, and he that does not live to God is dead.



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During Holy Week, we are accustomed to focusing on the death that followed Palm Sunday. But if we stop there, we miss much of the meaning of Good Friday and the Easter beyond. It is equally crucial that we remember the death that Christ called for, a price entirely worth paying. It is the path to communion with God himself. It is the road to eternal peace and prosperity. It is the only way to gain an unshakable faith, an unconquerable hope, and a life-changing love more precious than anything the crowds chase after. But this is what Jesus makes clear: This life doesn't come from simply wearing a cross; it comes from bearing a cross.

[Q] In what ways have you been wearing a cross but not bearing a cross?

[Q] How have you defined life too superficially or selfishly?

[Q] For which of the following do you most need to trust God in order to die to self?

- The agony I will feel in giving up bad habits
- That God is good when I don't feel his presence or understand what he's doing
- Humility to depend on my spiritual family
- That God can work in and through me to change me and the world around me

Teaching Point Two: We have to want Jesus more than self.

No wonder they crucified him. No wonder even some of Jesus' would-be disciples said: Never, Lord. I don't like this path you're talking about.

People still want to crucify Christ instead of die to self. There are times when it would be easier to rewrite the story of Jesus and make him someone who would never really insist on such difficult choices. We would like Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* Jesus—someone who would never do something so radical as to deny himself the pleasure of sex, who got married to Mary Magdalene and had a child, and whose real gospel was about touching the divine through physical pleasures and fertility.

If I view the church of Jesus in the *Da Vinci Code* way—as just a collection of corrupt or misguided people—if I can simply caricature spiritual disciplines as some sort of sick, twisted masochism ... it is freeing, in a way. I can take the parts of the biblical Jesus that I like—the ones that reinforce my lifestyle, that leave me feeling spiritual without much cost. I can go on with life as I have. I can keep the self I have.

But I don't want that self. I want a better self.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–17.



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- [Q] What compels us to want Jesus more than our old selves (v. 14)?
- [Q] According to verse 15, why did Jesus die?
- [Q] How do we quit viewing people from a worldly point of view (v. 16)?
- [Q] If we are a new creation in Christ, why do we fall into old habits?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us take steps to become new people in Christ.*

Activity: *Recording their answers on a whiteboard or poster board, ask the group to name ways that people become stuck in their faith. When your list is complete, ask them how a person could move beyond each situation.*

Teaching Point Three: Hate your life in this world to keep it for eternal life.

Arland D. Williams Jr. illustrates the kind of life Jesus demands of us.

If you've spent much time in the Washington D.C. area, you may know that there is a bridge named after Williams that crosses the Potomac River. On January 13th, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90 iced up upon takeoff and crashed into those frigid waters moments later. Many watched on the news the struggle to rescue the small number of survivors who treaded water for their life. Among the survivors was Arland Williams.

As the *Washington Post* tells it: "Five different times, a helicopter dropped a rope to save Williams. Five times, Williams passed the rope to other passengers in worse shape than he was. When the rope was extended to Williams the sixth time, he could not take hold and succumbed to the frigid waters. His heroism was not rash. Aware that his own strength was fading, [Williams] deliberately handed hope to someone else." Again and again and again and again and again and again, in the most difficult circumstances, Arland Williams made the choice to die to self.

There is a bridge to new life that stands at a place where someone else once made some deliberate choices. "No one takes my life from me," Jesus said to Peter and the other disciples shortly before walking to the cross. "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Read John 12:23–26.

- [Q] Jesus' death produced many seeds. How can our death to self do the same?
- [Q] What does it mean to hate my life? Does that mean I need to find ways to be miserable? If not, what does it mean?
- [Q] How will the Father honor the one who serves Christ?

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Part 3 Apply Your Findings

When he might have elected to do otherwise, Jesus chose to take up his cross and pay the ultimate price for human sin, that you and I might be forgiven and live forever with God. Jesus chose to pass to you and me the rope of salvation. If you have never taken hold of it before, grab hold of that rope today. Let Christ pull you to safety. Let him wrap you in the blanket of his family.

But once you've done that, don't stop there. Don't let the cross be merely a symbol of the life Jesus had, or that you'll have in heaven. Let it be a signpost to the life Christ calls you to in this world. Cross over the bridge and into the life of the kingdom of God. You know the way into that city, don't you? It's the way marked out by Jesus, and by every soul in every home and church and workplace and town who keeps making the difficult choice, the disciple's choice.

"If [you] would come after me," said Jesus, "[you] must deny [your]self and take up [your] cross and follow me." Sometimes, this call and cross causes us to tremble. But it's the tremble of new life.

Action Point: What is keeping you from taking up your cross? Share with the group and spend time praying for each other.

—Study by Daniel Meyer, with JoHannah Reardon

