

# Luke 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

## Analysis

**And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.** This verse contains Jesus' comprehensive definition of discipleship, establishing the non-negotiable requirements for following Him. The address "to them all" (pros pantas, πρὸς πάντας) emphasizes universality—these conditions apply to every would-be disciple without exception. The conditional "If any man will come after me" (ei tis thelei opisō mou erchesthai, εἰ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔρχεσθαι) respects human volition—discipleship is voluntary, but the terms are non-negotiable.

The first requirement, "let him deny himself" (arnēsasthō heauton, ἀρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν), uses the verb arneomai (ἀρνέομαι) meaning to renounce, disown, or utterly reject. This is the same verb used for Peter's denial of Christ (Luke 22:57). Denying self means rejecting self-rule, self-will, and self-centeredness—abdication from the throne of one's life. This is total, not partial; it's death to autonomy, not mere self-improvement.

The second requirement, "take up his cross daily" (airetō ton stauron autou kath' hēmeran, ἀιρέτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν), introduces the most shocking metaphor. In first-century Palestine, the cross was Rome's instrument of execution for slaves and insurrectionists—a symbol of shame, suffering, and death. Condemned criminals carried their cross to execution. Jesus commands disciples to daily embrace death to self—Luke uniquely adds "daily" (kath' hēmeran, καθ' ἡμέραν), emphasizing that discipleship is not a one-time decision but daily

recommitment. The third requirement, "follow me" (akoloutheitō moi, ἀκολουθείτω μοι), means walking in Jesus' footsteps, imitating His life, and obeying His teaching.

## Historical Context

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This teaching occurred at a crucial turning point in Jesus' ministry. Luke places it immediately after Peter's confession (Luke 9:18-20) and Jesus' first passion prediction (Luke 9:21-22). Jesus had asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." Jesus then explained that the Christ must suffer, be rejected, and be killed—contradicting popular messianic expectations of a conquering king who would overthrow Rome.

First-century Jewish messianic hopes were predominantly political and military. Most Jews expected Messiah to liberate Israel from Rome, restore Davidic monarchy, and establish earthly kingdom. Zealots advocated armed rebellion. The disciples themselves debated who would have greatest positions in Jesus' kingdom (Luke 9:46). Jesus systematically corrected these expectations, teaching that His kingdom advances through suffering, not violence; through service, not domination; through cross, not crown—at least not earthly crown yet.

The cross was the most horrific and shameful death imaginable in Roman society. Crucifixion was reserved for slaves, rebels, and the worst criminals—Roman citizens were exempt. For Jesus to command disciples to "take up the cross" was shocking, offensive language. This teaching prepared disciples for persecution they would face. Within decades, many would literally face martyrdom—Peter crucified upside down (tradition), Paul beheaded, James killed by sword (Acts 12:2). The early church embraced suffering as normative Christian experience (Acts 14:22, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12-16).

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. What does it mean practically to 'deny yourself' in daily decisions about career, relationships, and lifestyle?
2. How does the 'daily' nature of cross-bearing challenge the idea that Christian conversion is merely a one-time decision?
3. In what ways do contemporary presentations of Christianity often dilute or ignore Jesus' costly call to discipleship?
4. How can believers embrace the call to self-denial and cross-bearing without falling into works-righteousness or legalism?
5. What is the relationship between taking up the cross and experiencing the abundant life Jesus promises (John 10:10)?

## Interlinear Text

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Ἐλεγεν δὲ πρὸς πάντας Εἴ τις θέλει ὥπισω μου  
he said And to them all G1487 G5100 will after me  
G3004 G1161 G4314 G3956 G2309 G3694 G3450

ἐλθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἔαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν  
come let him deny himself and take up G3588 cross  
G2064 G533 G1438 G2532 G142 G4716

αύτοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι  
G846 G2596 daily and follow me  
G2250 G2532 G190 G3427

## Additional Cross-References

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**Romans 8:13** (Parallel theme): For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

**Colossians 3:5** (Parallel theme): Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

**Titus 2:12** (Parallel theme): Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

**2 Timothy 3:12** (Parallel theme): Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

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