



PART II

# Deeper

## Seeking God First



Luke 9:23-27, “<sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? <sup>26</sup> Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God (NIV).”

## FIND A WAY

Jesus is looking for people who want to do something for Him so badly they will find a way. Luke 9:23, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me (NIV).” Now what does that mean? It means placing a higher priority on what God wants than on what you want.

## FAN OR FOLLOWER?

This wasn't a “suggestion” by Jesus. This was a strong command or marching order. If you're going to follow Jesus, your first priority is His Kingdom and His Righteousness. If the kingdom of God and His righteousness are not your priorities then you're just a fan of Jesus. You're not a follower.

What's the difference between a FAN and a FOLLOWER? FANS stick around as long as things go their way. If things don't go their way, FANS walk away. FOLLOWERS, by contrast, stick around and stick it out because it isn't about them. It's about the one that they follow, the one that they “seek first” in their lives. The one who is the priority of their lives.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

Does KINGDOM OF GOD mean HEAVEN? Many Christians interpreted this as going to heaven without dying. I don't think so. Mark 9:1, “And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the KINGDOM of God has come with POWER (NIV).’”

So some of these disciples would not die before they saw the Kingdom of God come with POWER. When might that POWER have come? Well, after Jesus rose from the dead, He told his disciples in Luke 24:49, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with POWER from on high (NIV).” Then Acts 1:8 mentioned, “But you will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (NIV).” So what was this Kingdom of God Jesus spoke of? The Kingdom of God is the church. We are THE TEAM. Thus, part of picking up my cross daily and following Jesus is MAKING THE CHURCH a priority in my life.

How many of you have ever heard someone say: “I can be just as good a Christian without going to church?” Now, that's a lie. No one can be just as good a Christian without being part of a church. Granted, you can be a Christian without going to church and being part of a local congregation, but you CANNOT be JUST AS GOOD a Christian without being part of the church. Away from the church, it's easier to fall into temptation. Away from the church, it's easier to get discouraged. Away from the church, to grow cold in our relationship with God.

Ephesians 5:25,29-30 - “<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, JUST AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body (NIV).”

Jesus loves the church so much that He has invested Himself in her. He is constantly working inside the church to mold us and shape us into the radiant and holy bride that He desires us to be. He is not distant from us. He is constantly devoted to us to make us what He wants us to be.

If that's the type of priority Jesus has placed on His church – on the His Kingdom – shouldn't I be just as committed to making the church as successful and beautiful as I can? Shouldn't the church be my priority too? Look at how God wants us to prioritize the church. Romans 12:10 - “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves (NIV).” Galatians 5:13b - “...serve one another humbly in love (NIV).” **How can there be ANOTHER if we're not in the church?**

## CAPABLE OR AVAILABLE

Sometimes Christians sit like that long enough that they begin to think that church is a spectator sport. That they are the cheering section and the others on stage are the performers. But when we commit ourselves to grow our faith, we begin to realize that this isn't all there is about Christianity. There are times when you need to be involved in making things happen and work for Christ.

But there's another problem. A lot of people don't think they've got anything to contribute to the church so they don't. Many would say, “I can't sing. I can't play an instrument. I can't dance. I don't know enough about computers to help out during worship service. I can't teach.” They think, “I can't do this, and I can't do that, so I've really nothing to contribute. So, I'll just sit here and cheer and shout AMEN. And that'll be my contribution.”

Check out the followers of Jesus: Fishermen, Tax Collectors, Prostitutes. All kinds of uneducated and unworthy folks followed Jesus because He said (and meant) WHOEVER.

But there was ONE qualification that you HAD to meet to follow Jesus: Luke 9:23-24 - “<sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all:

*“WHOEVER wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For WHOEVER wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it (NIV).” Jesus was declaring that it isn't how much you know or how much you are skilled at. It is how much are you willing to DO for me.*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe you have to be deeply rooted in a church, why?
2. Why do you think is the root of so many disappointments in life?
3. How does seeking GOD first change the direction of ones life?