

WARM-UP

- Tell us about something or someone you are very passionate about.
- Did you ever do something inconvenient because of something you loved? Tell us about it.
- Did you ever decide to give something up because it became too difficult? What happened?

WORD *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* **MARK 8:34**

At the height of Jesus' ministry, thousands of men, women, and children would gather and even go hungry just to hear Him (Mark 6:34; Mark 8:2,9). Jesus would teach them, feed them, and heal them. But there is a difference between those who simply gather around Jesus and those who truly follow Him. Being a disciple of Jesus is a call to come and deny yourself, carry your cross, and follow Him.

1 | Come and deny yourself.

... he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself . . ." MARK 8:34

(Read also **MARK 8:33,35.**)

Many times, we become overly focused on our situation and challenges and on what we can or cannot do on our own. However, to follow Jesus means to put aside our own selfish desires, interests, plans, and thoughts. We should change our focus and place it on who He is, what He has done in our lives, and the calling He has for us. Is there a situation you are facing right now that is difficult? What do you need to do to shift your focus to Jesus?

2 | Come and carry your cross.

"... take up his cross . . ." MARK 8:34

Jesus' audience knew what the cross was for—to execute people. It was a symbol of one of the most painful and humiliating deaths they knew. The only time a person carried a cross was on the way to the place of their death. To carry the cross means to accept the rejection of the world for turning to Jesus and following Him. Discipleship involves a death that is like a crucifixion. How did you decide to give your whole life to God?

3 | Come and follow Jesus.

"... and follow me." **MARK 8:34**

Following Jesus is not about following rules, doing certain practices, or going to certain places or buildings where we feel closer to Him. Rather, following Jesus means we focus our eyes only on Him, and commit our whole lives to only Him, so we can fully obey Him and walk in His will for our lives. What does Jesus say we should lose our lives for (Mark 8:36)?

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APPLICATION

- Are you simply staying near Jesus, or are you following Him? Would you like to give your life to Him today?
- Are you giving Jesus Lordship over your life, and denying yourself to live according to His will? What is one thing you can submit to Him starting this week?
- Have you committed your life to God and the gospel? How can you bring the gospel to others starting today?

