

Natalie Ford
 4th Sunday of Lent
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Surrender
Luke 9: 18-27

Letting go of the way we think we should be living isn't easy.

"In the summer of 1988, Ben Patterson and three friends climbed Mount Lyell, the highest peak in Yosemite National Park. Ben was not one of the experienced climbers. ... The climb to the top and back was to take the better part of a day due, in large part, to the difficulty of the glacier you have to cross to get to the top. ... Ben writes, "soon I was trapped in a cul-de-sac of rock atop the Lyell Glacier, looking down several hundred feet of a sheer slope of ice, pitched at a forty-five degree angle. ... I was only ten feet from the safety of a rock. But one little slip and I wouldn't stop sliding until I had landed in the valley floor about fifty miles away! ... I was stuck and I was scared" (pp. 100-101).

"It took an hour for my experienced climbing friends to find me. Standing on the rock I wanted to reach, one of them leaned out and used an ice axe to chip two little footsteps in the glacier. Then he gave me the following instructions: 'Ben, you must step out from where you are and put your foot where the first foothold is. ... then.. swing your other foot across and land it in the next step. [Then] ... reach out and I will take your hand, and I will pull you to safety. ... But listen carefully: As you step across, don't lean into the mountain! If anything, lean out a bit. Otherwise, your feet could fly out from under you, and you will start sliding down.' "

Patterson says, "I looked at him real hard. ... For a moment, based solely on what I believed to be true about the good will and good sense of my friend, I decided to say NO to what I felt ... to lean out, step out, and traverse the ice to safety. It took less than two seconds to find out if my faith was well founded. It was").

Waiting: Finding Hope Where God Seems Silent (InterVarsity, 1991), by Ben Patterson. pp 101-2.

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their **cross** daily, and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will **lose** it. Those who **lose** their lives for my sake will save it....*

Kind of like hugging the mountain makes more sense than stepping away,
 It's not our natural inclination to take up a cross and follow Jesus.
 Losing our lives, letting go of our lives,
Surrender is not what most of us do best.

Most of us are trying to *save* our lives, to find happiness and peace,
 Safety and security,
 And these things *aren't bad* things to pursue—it's just that the happiness
 and peace, safety and security that the world offers to us
 Is so self-absorbed
 It's not the kind that will *last*,
 it's not the kind that will *truly satisfy* us, not now, not eternally.

Jesus offers us something far **better**,
 A *deeper, lasting* joy and peace, safety and security,
 but the *way to it* turns our minds a little upside down.

Or does it?

Have you ever heard the *proverb* about the man who did everything he could
 think of to find his own happiness, and he couldn't find it.
 Finally he did everything he could think of
 to make *someone else* happy and then he found true happiness.

St. Francis of Assisi has a prayer many of you know,
 Very similar....

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

When do you find yourself feeling like this?
 As a *parent*, I know these feelings toward my children—
 wanting to give and live for them,
 and as an *adult child*, I feel this towards my parents....
 Sometimes towards the needy coming in our doors....

When do you find *yourself* willing to sacrifice what you want,
 So that someone else can have what they need?
 Have you ever found out that by giving up what you want
 You find what you really need?

Could this be what *Jesus meant* when he said
 take up your cross and follow me?
 If you want to save your life you must lose it?

Jesus' way of saving us was through *surrender, humility, even death*.
 He humbled and served in order to save us.
 The new life came through *losing* his life.

I think in the same way new life in Christ comes to us when we
Take up our cross----
 when we *surrender* ourselves to the good of others
 when we *humble* ourselves, serving instead of being served
 when we make *sacrifices* instead of seeking our own desires first.

I believe we too must take the road
 of *surrender, humility, even death* in a way.

To faithfully follow Jesus Christ, I think *something inside of us must die*.
 We have to surrender our faith in ourselves.
 Let go of the *pride* we hold onto so dearly,
 And the self-reliance we think keeps us going.
 We have to give up and die to being our *own god*,
 And allow the true God and Savior to enter our hearts and lives.

As you might guess, this doesn't happen very easily...

Like Paul, we are tempted to hang onto our *resumes* in this life.
 We pride ourselves in our accomplishments, our connections,
 Our finances, and status, our talents and abilities.

I'll bet you're thinking of this list right now!

Somewhere inside we hope this gets us right with God.
But it's doesn't. It doesn't matter because we are saved by grace, not works.
Ephesians 2:8-10

God doesn't have a holy *scorecard*
and special rooms for the really upstanding folks in heaven.

It really makes a difference if we can come to a point like Paul did,
To let go of all our accomplishments, consider them *worthless*—
in light of what Jesus has done for us.

It makes all the difference in the world,
If we are willing to *let go of everything* we hold dear,
In order to *grab hold* of the life Jesus offers us.

And it doesn't happen *once and for all*.
Our Bible study author James Harnish talks about going forward to all the
altar calls at youth camp, and continually hoping that 'this time' it would
stick, and he'd be a changed guy forever!!!
Doesn't work that way.....

Notice that Jesus says take up your cross *daily*, and follow me.
That's because it's a daily decision we make, not a one time event.
Good news is we get a clean slate every morning!

More good news--we *don't do this alone*.
Only by the grace of God can we truly surrender,
And allow God to take over.
We ask for help, and the Holy Spirit is in us to help guide us.
(some call this a conscience, Christians call it the Spirit of God)

So taking up your cross,
And losing your life

Its done all the time by *ordinary* people,
Who follow Jesus right into the suffering and needs of others.

My *Aunt Kay* moved in with my grandma after her stroke, and she hasn't
left and doesn't plan to leave...sharing the same bed, the same room,
helping her with every daily activity so she won't need to go to a nursing
home.

I know a young couple who moved back to Oklahoma to take care of a **disabled sibling**, despite the pay cuts at work, and the loss of dear friends.

I've known parents caring for a **dying child**, trying to make him as comfortable as possible, allowing him to go to all the school functions, encouraging him to lead a 'normal' life, all the while watching him lose his life.

I've known a mother who travels several hours just to visit her son for an hour in **prison** every Sunday afternoon.

I see the workers at the **Day Shelter** giving of their time and talents to help those without anywhere to go....

the people of **Owasso Community Resources** using their own resources to help the needy here in our city...

the volunteers at **Mills** offering more than just tutoring, but also a bit of comfort and encouragement.

*Take up your cross daily, and follow me.
Those who lose their lives for my sake will save them.*

This is **Good News** of our Gospel.
This is the way for our Journey to Easter, and our Journey through life.

So let's Surrender.
Let go of what you think you need
and **grab hold of Jesus' hand**....
He will take you where you need to go. Amen.