

The Way of Jesus

Discussion Guide

Matthew 16:21-28

The Way of the Cross

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us not only to say the right words about you, but to follow you in your way. Teach us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and find true life in you. Amen.

Opening Connection

1. What is something you thought would be easy until you actually tried it?
2. Why is it sometimes easier to say the right thing than to live the right way?
3. How does that connect to Peter in this passage?

Read Matthew 16:21–28

As you read, notice:

- what Jesus says must happen
- how Peter responds
- what Jesus says discipleship requires
- what Jesus says about losing and finding life

1. Peter Has the Right Title, but the Wrong Imagination

Matthew 16:21–23

Peter has just confessed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” But now Jesus begins to show that the Christ must suffer, be killed, and be raised. Peter knows the title before he understands the way.

Look Closely

1. What does Jesus say must happen in verse 21?
2. How does Peter respond to Jesus?
3. Why might Peter’s response feel understandable?
4. Why is Peter still wrong?
5. What does Jesus mean when he says, “Get behind me, Satan”?
6. What does it mean that Peter is setting his mind on “the things of man” instead of “the things of God”?

Reflect and Apply

7. Where are you tempted to want Jesus’ victory without Jesus’ cross?
8. What are some ways we can have the right words about Jesus while quietly editing the way of Jesus?
9. Where might you be standing in front of Jesus instead of getting behind him and following?

2. The Way of Jesus Is the Way of the Cross

Matthew 16:24

Jesus says:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Look Closely

10. Who is Jesus speaking to in verse 24?
11. What three actions does Jesus name?
12. What does it mean to deny yourself?
13. What does self-denial **not** mean?
14. Why should we not reduce “take up your cross” to ordinary annoyances or inconveniences?

Reflect and Apply

15. Where is it hardest for you to surrender self-rule to Jesus?
16. What is one area where Jesus may be calling you to deny yourself?
17. What is one cost you may need to carry because you belong to Jesus?
18. Why is it good news that Jesus never calls us to a road he refuses to walk?

3. The Life We Clutch Is the Life We Lose

Matthew 16:25–26

Jesus says whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it. He then asks what it profits someone to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul.

Look Closely

19. What contrast does Jesus make in verse 25?
20. Why is the phrase “for my sake” important?
21. What question does Jesus ask in verse 26?
22. What does Jesus compare in that question?

Reflect and Apply

23. What are some ways people try to “save” their lives apart from Jesus?
24. What are you most tempted to clutch or protect?
25. What are people around us being trained to “gain”?
26. What might they be forfeiting in the process?
27. What would it look like to surrender that area to Jesus?

4. The Cross Is Not the End of the Story

Matthew 16:27–28

The cross is real, but it is not the end. Jesus says the Son of Man will come in glory, and Matthew immediately follows this passage with the Transfiguration, where Peter, James, and John receive a glimpse of Jesus' kingdom glory.

Look Closely

- 28. What does Jesus say the Son of Man will do?
- 29. How does verse 27 give hope after Jesus' hard words about the cross?
- 30. What happens immediately after this passage in Matthew 17?
- 31. How does the Transfiguration give the disciples hope before they continue toward the cross?

Reflect and Apply

- 32. Where do you need hope that the cross is not the end of the story?
- 33. What kind of obedience might look like loss right now?
- 34. How does Jesus' future glory change how we see that loss?

Connecting the Whole Passage

- 35. What does this passage show us about Jesus?
- 36. What does this passage show us about discipleship?
- 37. Why is it not enough to confess the right title for Jesus if we refuse his way?
- 38. How does this passage summarize the whole series, *The Way of Jesus*?
- 39. What phrase, verse, or idea from this passage do you most need to carry with you?

Looking Ahead: Rooted

As this series ends, we are preparing for *Rooted*, a series about practices that help us stay rooted in faith: Scripture, prayer, worship, community, and obedience. Cross-shaped discipleship does not grow by accident; roots grow through ordinary faithfulness.

- 40. Why does cross-shaped discipleship need deep roots?
- 41. Which practice helps you stay most rooted in Jesus right now?
- 42. Which practice do you most need to grow in?
- 43. What is one small act of ordinary faithfulness you can practice this week?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Forgive us for the ways we try to correct your path, avoid your cross, or save our lives apart from you.

Teach us to get behind you and follow.

Help us deny ourselves without hating ourselves. Help us take up the cross without pretending it is easy. Help us lose our lives for your sake and find true life in you.

Root us deeply in your love, your word, your people, and your way. Amen.