



# THE INVITATION

EASTER SERIES

## Discussion Guide

### To Lose Your Life: Luke 9.21-25

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Describe a time that you were invited to something big. What response was required on your part?
- o Optional: What from the sermon, if anything, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

**Setting the Stage:** *Jesus invites us to the cross. Every Easter we hear this message, the invitation to the cross, for in the cross is life. Jesus lived. He died on the cross, and he rose again from the dead. What he has done has opened the door to new life, life as it was always meant to be. We are invited to partake. We are invited to the cross. Then what? Is that it? Do we simply say “Yes, thank you very much”? Is there something more? Or, are we just supposed to sit around and wait, to wait for the life he has promised to somehow arrive? How long are we supposed to wait? Some of us have been waiting a really long time, waiting for that life. What if Jesus’ invitation to the cross wasn’t just to a door to new life? What if it was more? What if the invitation to the cross was also an invitation to a new way of life, a way of living, crucified living that brings about in an ever growing way the life promised? Would we accept that invitation?*

**Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes** (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Luke 9.21-25.
- What steps did Jesus affirm he would take in his role?
- What steps did Jesus invite those who would be his disciples to take? What is the reasoning behind the invitation to these steps?
- In what ways are the steps of Jesus and his disciples similar? In what ways are they dissimilar?
- What might it look like to accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him today?
- Where do you see people living in this way? Can you elaborate?
- Consider your own life. Do you feel that you are responding authentically to Jesus’ invitation? Can you elaborate?
- With which part of Jesus’ invitation do you struggle the most, if at all? Can you explain?
- What do you think lies behind your struggle in this area?
- What might reduce the struggle for you? Would you be willing to take steps to act on this?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

## Group Notes

### *To Lose Your Life: Luke 9.21-25*

#### **Context and Background**

**Spiritual Disciplines:** God has a life that He intends for us, a life other than that which we live on our own terms and by our own means (Eph.2.10). Access to this life is found in the person and ministry of Jesus. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus opened a way to access God's life for us. While God freely grants us access to this life, Scripture teaches that we have a part in moving toward this life. Jesus clearly taught that those that were his disciples were to engage in the active and ongoing process of self-denial and death to self as their part in moving to true life (Luke 9.21-25). Likewise, Paul noted that followers of Jesus were to engage in the process of putting off old habits and attitudes and putting on the character of Christ as their part of this process (Phil. 2.12-13; Eph. 4.20-32; Col. 3.5-17; Titus 2.11-14). The practices involved in this process of self-denial and death to self are called spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that facilitate a denial of self and a replacement of old attitudes with new attitudes. These practices are not acts of righteousness. That is, they are not acts that obtain salvation for people. Rather, they are means of opening one's life to God so that God has free access to one's heart to do the deep work of true spiritual transformation. The spiritual disciplines have been part of the life of the church since the earliest days. In Acts 2.42 we find that the first Jesus followers practiced the disciplines of study, fellowship, Eucharist, and prayer. According to Jesus, the practice of spiritual disciplines (actions that lead to a denial of self) is to be part of the daily life of a disciple (Luke 9.23). While disciplines are to be a part of the daily life of a disciple, one need not practice the same disciplines every day. Disciplines function something like machines at your local gym. You use only the machines that are needed to work on the parts of your body that need attention. Thus, we use only the disciplines that address the areas of our life that are not yet fully submitted to Christ so that His life might fill us and become our own. Disciplines are not harsh or life-draining. Rather, disciplines are grace-filled and life-giving. The disciplines open our lives to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to fill us with the grace we need for life. They affirm that we need God to live in us and through us, that on our own we are not capable of truly living. Over time, the goal is to be transformed and thus no longer have a need for these disciplines as one has fully taken on the life of Christ. Many of the disciplines that we encourage at Browncroft are found in Scriptures, both in the life of Christ and in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. However, anything that makes room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives can be a spiritual discipline. God is the great teacher. Often, He will lead us to practice disciplines specific to our own needs and situation if we are open to such teaching. We should be open to the practice of such disciplines as a means of partnering with God in finding the life He has for us.

#### **The Text**

**The life of the Son of Man (Luke 9.18-22):** In the text of Luke, we are nearing a major transition in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is about to shift from his ministry to an intentional journey to the cross (Luke 9.51). Before he makes this major shift, Jesus seeks to explain the nature of the events that are about to transpire. Jesus begins by confirming his identity with the disciples. Because of the nature of Jesus' ministry—a ministry of teaching and healing—it was certain that the crowds had many ideas about who Jesus was and what he was doing. However, if the disciples were to understand the events that were to transpire in Jerusalem, they had to understand the true nature and identity of Jesus. Jesus' disciples affirmed that though the crowds considered Jesus to be a great prophet, they understood that he was God's messiah. This is a term loaded with great theological meaning for Jesus' audience. The basic idea about the messiah in Jewish thought was that he was a special agent sent by God to deliver God's people from spiritual and physical exile. Jesus affirms that this is his true identity and role. However, he forbids his disciples to proclaim this reality just yet. Some have questioned Jesus' motives in keeping his identity secret. However, we find some understanding in Jesus' interpretation of what he would do as a messiah. Jesus stated that he would suffer, be rejected, die and be resurrected. This role portrayed Jesus as a suffering messiah, quite different from the conquering militant messiah common to Jewish thought. More than likely, Jesus wished to keep his identity secret in the present because of the great controversy this divergence from common messianic views would cause.

**The life of a disciple of Jesus (Luke 9.23-25):** Jesus stated clearly that his role was to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. It was in fulfilling this role that Jesus opened the door to life as God intended it (Mark 10.45). In theological terms, this work is called the atonement. Most often, we view the cross as the central symbol for this work. However, Jesus indicates that the cross is meant to stand for more than just his own role in making life available to people. According to Jesus, the cross also stands as a symbol of the way his followers should daily live. Jesus instructs his disciples that should they wish to truly be his disciples, they must do three things: deny themselves, daily take up their cross, and follow after him. To deny oneself is to come to the point that one acknowledges that they are not their own god, that they are not a position of ultimate authority. Self denial is the rejection of ourselves and our well-being as the ultimate point of reference in the world. In the ancient world, the cross was a symbol of death. Thus, to take up one's cross daily is to engage in the daily practice of the mortification (death) of oneself. The aspects of self that must die are those parts that stand opposed to God and His way of life, those aspects that conflict with life in God's Kingdom. Here Jesus refers to a daily process, not a one-time event, a process that the Church has understood to be facilitated by spiritual disciplines (See *Spiritual Disciplines*). Out of an attitude of self-denial and the practices of mortification one finds that they are in fact following after Jesus, seeking to take up his life and character as their own. This, in fact, is where true life is found. The desire to save aspects of one's own life or attitudes of self-rule actually cause one to miss the life God offers.

**Application:** Jesus went to the cross to open the door to a new way of living. The work he accomplished on the cross is something that only he could do. However, the cross stands for so much more to the disciple. The cross is not just the door to life but the means by which one should live. The cross stands as an invitation to die, to die daily to one's own self, to engage in practices that make God the central point of reference rather than self. The cross is an invitation to a new way of living, a life of stepping aside so that Christ might take center stage in our lives. It is seeing the cross as both a door and a way of living that true life is found.