

Sermon Series: The gift exchange

#4 Give God your life and receive God's new life

Luke 9:23-26

This week Penne and I came across a **signboard** posted outside a bookshop. It read:

“We’ve moved a few books around: *Travel* is now in the *Fantasy* section, *Sci-fi* is in the *Current Affairs* section, and *Epidemiology* is in *Self Help*.”

Life is **nowhere near “normal”** for us in 2022.

If you just arrived in a time machine from 2018, you **would not recognise the planet**. So much has changed and we no longer know what “**normal**” looks like.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke today shows, however, that Jesus never aimed for, nor settled for what we call “normal” life. He said:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For **whoever wants to save their life will lose it**, but whoever **loses their life for me will save it**. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”
(Luke 9:23-25)

In Luke chapter 9 Jesus **changes his course** - resolutely setting his compass for **Jerusalem** and the **cross**. He tells his disciples it would be the road to the **end of his own life**, but the **beginning of a new and glorious one** for all.¹ And then he turned to the crowd² with an **invitation** to **join him** on that **same journey**.

We’ve been working our way through some of the biblical promises about a **gift exchange** between God and the children of God³ (you and me)...

1. Give God your worry and receive God’s peace
2. Give God your hurt and receive God’s healing
3. Give God your grief and receive God’s joy, and finally...

¹ Luke 9:22

² Vs. 23

³ We made the point in earlier sermons that as those “adopted” into God’s “family” by grace we are privileged to know the access God gives to many blessings, not through earning God’s favour, or by any merit of our own

4. Give God your life and receive God's new life

We've learned that God happily receives all our **hurts, habits, and hang-ups** and in exchange gives us blessings of grace and goodness such as **peace, healing, joy**. Now we turn to the ultimate gift God promises to us - new and **eternal life** by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.⁴

The gift exchange in focus for today's study is spelled out in the reading we heard from Luke chapter 9. It's as if Jesus said to all, "Give up life as you know it, and instead receive the life that God gives." **Give God your current "normal life"** and instead receive new life from God.

The very earliest Christians on record seem to have grasped this gift of God with both hands. Some scholars say the words of **2 Timothy 2:11** are one of the earliest hymns sung or spoken at Christian gatherings, saying: "if we died with Christ, we will also live with Christ; If we endure, we will also reign with Christ..." Perhaps it was the first Christian chorus! Whatever the case, in the early church this crucial truth of dying to self and living a new life in Christ captured the essence of discipleship.



Let's zoom in on Luke 9:23-25:

- Firstly, the Greek word translated "**life**" refers to normal, **physical living** as we know it. Jesus asks that we exchange "normal" life for another that God alone gives. God's new life is fit for both **suffering** (the journey in this life) *and* for **glory** (the journey in the new heaven and earth to come).
- Secondly, Jesus refers to the "**self**"⁵ (dying to "self" or denying one's "self"). I love the writing of 19th Century English author **GK Chesterton**. He wittily wrote, "There is only one thing safe from plagiarism – self-denial". In his generation **very few people**, it seems, were competing for the honours of "selflessness"! Perhaps, today, we might suggest the best exemplars of selflessness are our **health workers** and **aid workers** amidst this pandemic.

⁴ Romans 6:23

⁵ Not just "himself" or "herself" or "them" in the Greek, but "self"

Jesus call, however, seems more fundamental than sacrificial acts of service. He calls us to give up living a **self-centred** life divorced from God’s ways – to “die” to self.

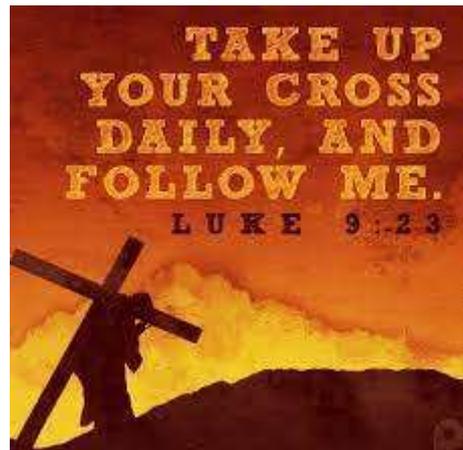
Social critic and satirist **Mokokomo Mokhonoana** says, “There is no selflessness. There is only fair and unfair **selfishness.**” He may be on to something! His provocative saying gives us pause to reflect on the fact that Jesus no-where calls for people to adopt altruistic humanism as their “religion. Instead, it’s **Jesus’ own unique self-less-ness** that is our hope.

His dying to self, even to the point of crucifixion, and as an offering for our sins, is **both the means of our salvation** from sin and physical death, and **the pattern of life** fitting for those who will be raised with him to new life with God. He **isn’t** calling us to selflessness that saves us, but to a self-denial that **befits those who He is saving.**⁶

Jesus invites us to **give up** “normality” in exchange for a new life shaped by **loving God** and **loving others.**⁷ Jesus said elsewhere,

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which [I] will give you” (John 6:27).

- Lastly, note how Jesus spoke **metaphorically here.** In vs. 24, he called people to carry their own **stauros** – the large, heavy wooden upright beam for **crucifixion.**⁸ It was a common sight in those days – criminals making a difficult **one-way journey** outside the city to be crucified (the road Jesus himself would walk).



⁶ Ephesians 2:8-10, Philippians 2:3-11

⁷ Matthew 22:34-40

⁸ Luke notes that Jesus said to do this “daily”, further emphasising that this is metaphor

If I'm honest, I'm not all that attracted to the call of Jesus to die to my "self", to walk the road of sacrifice and suffering with Him. The road of self-denial and sacrifice is **counter to all advertising campaigns** that influence me daily and cajole me pursue all the comforts I apparently deserve and need in my life today. No wonder it was the **poor**, the lame, the slaves, the outcasts, the marginalised, the imprisoned, and the downtrodden who were the **early adopters** of the Gospel of Jesus. For them, "normal" was not a good life at all. They welcomed a radical new life offered as a gift from God in Jesus' call!

I'm more eager when I hear Jesus describe the **good things** in store for those who follow Him. The "upside" of our future resurrection, the new heaven and new earth to come, and the comfort of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the now – these things are attractive to me. But they are not mine without also assenting to Jesus' call to the road of sacrifice. If you're like me, we also need God's Spirit to **open eyes** and our **hearts** to Christ's invitation and call in Luke 9:23-25. We will also need encouraging words of Jesus, like those in John 10:10, "I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full."

We live in a time when the **preservation of "self" and "self-government"** is touted as **paramount** as seen in many public protests in major cities – "We must get back to our 'normal' life" they say. The cry for "freedom" is ironically coming often from those who are "freer" than most citizens of history past!

In great contrast, Jesus' call in Luke 9:23-25 cuts through and warns that **true life** is about **love for God** and **sacrificial love for others**, and not about "self". It also reminds us that true life with God is the **product** of Jesus' selflessness for our sake. It is offered to us as a gift as a result of His goodness and love.

So then, it is a matter of hearing the call and invitation and **making a response**. Those first disciples witnessed a division between those who received Him (Jesus) and those who rejected Him.⁹ Our response, like theirs, has crucial consequences for the direction our lives will take from this day forward.

⁹ John 1:11,12

If you are someone who has never responded in faith to Jesus' invitation, never accepted God's gift of new life, let me offer you that opportunity in a prayer you could pray.

- John's Gospel says: "...whoever hears my word and believes [the one] who sent me has eternal life and... has **crossed over from death to life.**" (John 5:24) Do you hear the promised gift exchange in those words?
- The Apostle Paul wrote, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved** [from your sins and from death]." (Rom. 10:9)

If you are someone who has already accepted God's gift of new life (believed in Him, and follow Him), today I invite you to **refresh** your commitment to this path. This prayer is suitable for you to pray or adapt to your needs.

Let us pray...

"Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience). Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.

Thank you for your death upon the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer forgiveness and the gift of your Holy Spirit.

I now willingly receive your gift of new life. Thank you for your promises in the Scriptures upon which I can trust. I pray this in the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

Adapted from Nicky Gumbel, "Why Jesus?" (Alpha North America, 2008) p. 21.

If you have prayed this prayer for the first time, or if you are returning to faith in God after being away for a time, I encourage you to speak to another Christian or a pastor, priest, or minister of the church near you where you are today.

Steve Webster St Michaels North Carlton December 2021

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