

One truth shared: Because Jesus carried his cross for us, we deny ourselves and carry our crosses for him.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Matthew 16:21-27

A Necessary Weight

Everyone packs with different priorities. Which best describes you? Do you travel light or pack heavy?

- Some will pack light and take as little as possible along with them (like in a backpack). It's someone who prioritizes getting to and from places fast without bringing the extra weight of luggage.
- Others like to be prepared for *everything*. They'll pack an outfit for every weather scenario and all the beauty products from the bathroom counter ... just in case! They'll be prepared, but the luggage will be heavy. Who knows, maybe the weight will be necessary to carry?

In Matthew 16, Jesus tells his followers that the extra weight of the cross is necessary. Peter just confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world. But when Jesus told him that dying on the cross would be necessary to save the whole world, Peter didn't want to hear it. In fact, he pulled Jesus to the side and tried to get him to avoid the weight of the cross waiting for him in Jerusalem.

Here's how Jesus replied: "GET BEHIND ME, SATAN!"

Wow! What if Jesus would say that to you? Does that get your attention? Why was Jesus so serious with Peter? Because he wanted Peter to understand something important. If Jesus avoided the cross, our sins would not be forgiven and we would have no idea where we were going after we die.

But Jesus carried his cross for us. He didn't avoid the weight or the pain. He denied his own comfort so that we would someday be comfortable with him in heaven forever. But until then, Jesus tells us we too must carry crosses. No cross? No Christian. It means that Jesus wants us to put him first in our lives. He wants us to put others first as well. To keep it simple, Jesus wants us to deny ourselves and follow him. This is the Christian carrying their cross.

When we realize that we have all the life we need in Jesus, we can live as selflessly as Jesus did. Will it be easy? No! But will it be worth it? Absolutely. The cross of Jesus was worth it. After he rose from the dead, he was seated in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. He carried his cross first, then received his crown of glory. It will be the same for us. The best part of a long trip with heavy luggage is dropping it on the floor when you get home. That's what it will be like when we get to heaven. We get to drop the weight of our crosses and pick up the crown that Jesus has waiting for us in heaven. First the cross, then the crown.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it is not easy for me to deny my own wants and desires. Keep me focused on how you gave yourself up for me on the cross. Use your sacrifice to motivate me to live a sacrificial life for my friends and family. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

Year A – Proper 17

The Church God Wants

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A Necessary Weight

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- Which best describes you: Do you travel light or pack heavy?
- What is the heaviest backpack you've ever carried on a long walk or hike? Describe how your legs and back felt on that trip. When did the weight feel heaviest? Describe what it felt like when you were able to drop that weight and rest.

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

Following Jesus (by keeping him first in life, honoring him with our words and actions, respecting our parents and teachers, etc.) can often feel like heavy weight. Give a recent example from your life when that's been true for you.

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

Reread Matthew 16:21-27.

- In verse 21, why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to tell his disciples what was about to happen to him?
- In verse 22, what do you think was going through the mind of Peter when he confronted Jesus?
- Put verse 23 into your own words. What message is Jesus trying to get through to Peter?
- Jesus says that carrying *our* crosses means to “deny ourselves.” What does that mean to you? What How does would that look like in your everyday life?

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.*

Agree or Disagree: Jesus has set you free from living for yourself.