

## Prayers

### **To God**

Praise God, and spend time worshipping Him for who He is. This can be done in many ways, by using Scripture (the psalms), using normal words, or using a heavenly tongue.

### **For myself**

Ask the Lord to help you deal properly with your finances. Lay out before the Lord the issues you face, and wait on Him for His response.

### **For others**

Lord God Almighty, You have created all of us, and You have made people very differently who live in different places around the world. Give us the courage to cross all cultural barriers as we go about our work for Your Kingdom, let us never forget people of far and distant places whose affairs are not covered on our news channels, and may we always be willing to be adventurous in our proclamation of the Gospel. AMEN

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## Meditation

Where will we find the God who is our Creator?  
We will find Him in His world, if we open our eyes to see Him ...

Where will we find the God who is our salvation?  
We will find Him as we place our faith in Christ who gave His life for us ...

Where will we find the God who is our healer?  
We will find Him when we cry to Him for help and receive His touch ...

Where will we find the God who is our rock?  
We will find Him when in trouble we place our weary hand in His...

Where will we find the God who is our defender?  
We will find Him in the midst of battle, defeating the enemy for our sakes ...

Where will we find the God whose heart is love?  
We will find Him when we yield ourselves and serve Him with our lives ...

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## Bible Passage

### **Luke 9:18-27**

<sup>18</sup> One day, the disciples came to be with Jesus as He was praying privately, and He asked them,

**"Who do the people say that I am?"**

<sup>19</sup> They answered,

*"John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and yet others, that one of the ancient prophets has returned to life."*

<sup>20</sup> So He said to them,

**"But who do you say that I am?"**

And Peter answered,

*"God's Messiah!"*

<sup>21</sup> Then after warning them He told them not to say this to anyone, <sup>22</sup> and said,

***"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. He will be murdered, and will rise from the dead on the third day!"***

<sup>23</sup> He said to all of them,

***"All who want to be my followers must deny themselves, take up their cross each day and follow me. <sup>24</sup> Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> What benefit is it to gain the whole world, but then lose or destroy life itself?***

***<sup>26</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words are those of whom the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God."***

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## Review

Few will be unfamiliar with this Scripture. It describes the famous incident when Peter first declared the truth about Jesus. He may have already believed that Jesus was God's Messiah, but he was placed on the spot by Jesus' firm question, and his forthright response was welcomed by Jesus and has since inspired countless Christians. Moreover, Jesus' reply to Peter is significant, because Jesus used it to reveal the truth about His ministry (9:22) and call on all His disciples to yield everything to Him (9:23f.).

To begin with, Jesus was praying privately when the disciples approached Him. But Jesus was in no mood to talk with them about prayer; he would do this later but for now, something else was important. He asked them a sharp question, strangely, about Himself. We should see this coming, for most of Luke 9 builds up to Jesus' question '*who do people say that I am*' (9:18). Earlier, the disciples had gone on mission preaching Jesus' message about God's Kingdom (9:1f.). Luke has just reported that Herod wanted to know who Jesus was (9:7f.), if only to get rid of Him. Then, the crowds at the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand would have asked who could do such things.

So the disciples reported to Jesus that some believed with Herod that He might be John the Baptist returned to life (9:19), and that others had theories from their cultural past, about Elijah or the prophets (9:19). But Jesus focussed on the disciples and their response to His question (9:20), and He wanted to get more than just an answer. By asking first about the opinion of others and then their own, he wanted the disciples to spot the difference between

themselves and the crowd. They had been led to a different and new place of understanding, and a different place of faith in God.

It was Peter who spoke up, declaring Jesus as '*God's Messiah*'. This wonderful declaration of faith undoubtedly inspired the early Christians, for it is reported in both Matthew (16:12f.) and Mark (8:27f.), who tell us this happened at Caesarea Philippi. It has also inspired generations of Christians for whom Peter's answer, in the form of '*Jesus is the Christ*', has become a classic statement of faith. The other Gospels tell us about other subsequent conversations between Jesus and Peter (Matthew 16:22f.), but Luke slips past this rapidly to reveal Jesus' twofold response to Peter. Firstly, He set out the truth about His work and destiny, predicting His passion and death (9:22). Secondly, He outlined a radical programme of discipleship (9:23f.), with powerful prophetic words about the future (9:26,27).

But just before this, Jesus surprisingly told the disciples to keep quiet about His identity. Why was this, after commissioning the disciples to go out on mission (9:1f.)? There are several reasons. Firstly, Jesus did not want Jewish Messianic expectations to control His ministry, or be limited by cultural arguments and sensitivities, He wanted people to encounter God! Secondly, Jesus wanted people to decide for themselves whether He was the Messiah; He did not want people believing this on the word of someone else, but on their own enquiry and faith. This last point contains wisdom even for today.

It was surely right that Jesus should now challenge His followers (and us who read Luke's Gospel), to accept that God's Messiah does not just go around pleasing people. Of course, He helps people because He loves them, but He has another work to do which is not easy or pleasant. His destiny had been set out for Him in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalm 24 and Isaiah 53), especially the prophets, and Jesus knew it. Luke reports that Jesus perceived His work to be fourfold; to suffer abuse by the world, to be rejected, to be subsequently slaughtered, but then to rise to new life victorious (9:22)! This was His path, and no one at that time was able appreciate that it would bring salvation. Human reasoning failed to see this eternal truth, only song-writers and prophets had spoken of it under the power of the Holy Spirit! We who have the benefit of hindsight should therefore remember that salvation is a spiritual truth conveyed by the Holy Spirit; ultimately human reasoning cannot catch it, the mind can only chase it.

Our last five verses are a challenge to radical discipleship; Jesus sets out a clear message about what it means to follow Him. Nothing else will do except surrender to the Saviour (9:23), following Him not so much 'on the cross', but 'on the pathway to the cross'. Some think that Jesus' words '*take up your Cross and follow me*' are a call to martyrdom, but this is wrong, as is clear from what comes next. Jesus declares that when a follower is ready to die, true life is found, and this is not just about eternal life, it is about real life now.

Jesus has come to this world to save it, and ultimately, He will complete His salvation in glory, bringing this world to its end (9:26); no one can ignore this. But Jesus is also concerned about God's world and its life, while it lasts. He has come to establish His kingdom on earth, a point He has made throughout His ministry (4:43, 8:1, 9:2). Jesus' challenging prophecy at the end of our passage says this, '*I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God.*' (9:27), but it is often misunderstood. It does not mean that some of those present will be transported to heaven! Rather, that they will see God's Kingdom on earth in the form of the 'body of Christ', God's church, after Jesus has finished His work and returned to the Father in glory.

Jesus' call is radical, challenging, and ultimately, glorious. It is also the same for the first disciples and for us; we cannot afford to ignore this. The revolutionary discipleship of self sacrifice and service will transform the church today.

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# Going Deeper

## Notes on the text and translation

### V18 *'the disciples came to be with Jesus as He was praying alone'*

#### Other translations:

*'Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him'* (NIV)

*'when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples with Him'* (NRSV)

The different translations all come as a result of two Greek sentences which do not sit easily together. The first says that Jesus was praying completely alone and the next says that the disciples were with Him; surely the two are mutually exclusive! Jesus could not have been by himself if the disciples were with Him! The NRSV solves this problem by adding the word 'only' (which is not strictly in the Greek), the NIV simply presents the situation without comment or guidance. I have translated the Greek verb as if it refers to something that was in the process of happening (Greek imperfect tense) rather than a static state of affairs, and this seems to me to make more sense.

### V22 *'He will be slaughtered'*

#### Other translations:

*'must be killed'* (NIV)

*'and be killed'* (NRSV)

Why have I chosen to use the term 'slaughtered'? It is because the Greek word means the taking of a person's life by someone else, and it will perhaps help us understand the death of Jesus if we use words that make us think more deeply about what happened and why

## Further Comments

### *Jesus' habit of prayer*

The Gospels offer us a clear picture of Jesus' habit of praying early in the mornings, especially when important things were about to happen in His life. His spirit knew the value of spending time with the Father at moments of critical importance. We also know from elsewhere in the Gospel records that the disciples were very interested in Jesus' prayer life (Matt 6:5,6), and in the next chapter of Luke we hear them ask Him about how to pray (11:1). On this occasion, however, Jesus broke off His prayer and confronted the disciples with His sharp question.

### *The title 'Son of Man' (verse 22)*

Here, Jesus refers to Himself as the 'Son of Man', so what are we to make of this? There is considerable confusion about the various names and titles of Jesus found in the Gospels, so it is helpful if we focus on how each Gospel writer uses the various terms, 'Son of God', 'Son of Man', etc. Luke frequently tells us that Jesus used the term 'Son of Man' to refer to Himself (5:24, 7:34, etc.). This is a classic Hebrew and Aramaic expression that can be used in a considerable number of ways, for example, it can refer to ordinary people, and mean simply 'human'. However, it is also used clearly in the Old Testament as a title for God's servant or Messiah, as in Daniel 7:13 (though some dispute this). It seems to me that Jesus

used the term to simply speak of Himself as a man, and this is what He means by this here in verse 22.

What then are we to make of the other, very similar term 'Son of God'. For your reference, in Luke's Gospel, the term is only used either by demons (4:3, 4:41, 8:28, etc.), and when Pilate asks Jesus whether He is the 'Son of God', Jesus turns the question back on him. Just like the title 'Messiah', it seems that Jesus wanted people to come to their own conclusion about His identity as divine, He was not prepared to simply claim this on His own. It is a noble stance of course, but it has the benefit of putting people in charge of their own decisions about Jesus. What God wants is for us to decide that this is the truth about Jesus, not because anyone says so, or even because demons know this to be fact, but because we know it for ourselves.

### ***Why does Jesus not rebuke Peter, as He does in the story found in Matthew and Mark?***

Undoubtedly, when this event happened, there was considerable interaction between Jesus and the disciples, and the Gospels of Matthew and Mark record some of this (Matthew 16:16f. And Mark 8:27f.). But Luke has a different agenda, and wants us to be focussed on Jesus, not on the disciples. He does not feel it necessary to go into the discussion between Peter and Jesus concerning the founding of the church, for example, for Luke was content that the church would be founded as a result of the work of Jesus, and the disciple's response of absolute discipleship (9:23f.).

There is just a brief hint at the contentious discussion between Peter and Jesus, when Luke says, '*then after warning them, he told them not to say this to anyone*' (9:21). Grammatically, Jesus' warning need not be about the same issue as the rest of the sentence (not talking about Jesus as the Messiah), and it could well refer to those parts of the story found in Matthew and Mark but not in Luke.

### ***The fourfold pathway of discipleship***

Here, Jesus sets out clearly His terms for discipleship (9:23-27). These verses can be analysed as having four distinct elements:

- Self denial, taking up of a Cross, and following Jesus (23)
- The need for submission; submission to Christ brings life and submission to the world brings death (24,25), choose accordingly
- A cautionary word about not be ashamed of Jesus (26). Those who avoid Jesus' name risk God's wrath at His glorious coming (26)
- A promise that the believer will see the Kingdom of God come (27) – a promise fulfilled in the coming of the church, and one that is fulfilled in our lives as we see the church built up as a result of our obedient discipleship.

Each of these four discipleship elements are important and our response to them is critical. Some scholars feel that only the first element is truly about discipleship. They suggest that the next two elements are words of wisdom spoken by Jesus in general, and the last is a separate saying inserted into the text here. There is not obvious evidence for these theories however, except for an inability to understand the text as it stands. It seems to me that each one of these elements tells us something important about our discipleship, which will be discussed next.

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# Discipleship

## ***Application***

### ***Are we interested in prayer?***

At the beginning of this passage, we find the disciples interested enough in what Jesus is doing to disturb Him when He was praying! This seems presumptive, but Jesus does not rebuke the disciples for their interruption. He takes their interest and builds on it. God does not rebuke us for our interest, though it may point us in other directions!

### ***A statement of faith (verse 20)***

There are a number of 'statements of faith' to be found in Scripture, but this is surely one of the most important. Faith is rooted in the conviction that Jesus is God's anointed, that He is sufficient for our salvation and that He loves us enough to die for us. Peter's declaration may need a little interpretation for today, but it must surely continue to basic for all Christians. It is the 'response we must all make to Jesus piercing question *'who do YOU say that I am!'*

### ***Discipleship 1 (verse 23)***

Jesus clearly calls His disciples to walk the same pathway as Himself, but what does this mean? He wants them to show love and compassion through preaching the Gospel and ministering God's power in miracles of healing and grace. You may say that taking up Jesus' Cross means something else, but I suggest that Luke chapter 9 says this, precisely. What does it mean to 'lift up your Cross', then? It means that following Jesus and doing what He says will ultimately bring us into conflict with our world, and we should be ready to pay the price for this. Jesus had to die on a Cross because of His ministry, and although most Christians will never be called to do this, some will. Let us never forget those who do.

### ***Discipleship 2 (verses 24,25)***

Disciples are called to lose their lives in Christ. Of course, we know this theme not only from the words of Jesus, but also from the teaching of Paul, who says in Romans 8:13, *'for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.'* None of us can escape the challenge of this teaching. In the midst of daily living, it can be easy to allow 'self' to take the upper place in our minds, deeds and thoughts, without even knowing it; it is natural. For this reason, we need to be 'born again' of the Spirit of God if we are to grasp all it means to be a disciple of Christ.

### ***Discipleship 3 (verse 26)***

Most of us would surely say that we are not ashamed of Christ. This is easy to say in abstract, but the rub comes when we are interrupted in life and suddenly presented with an unexpected challenge to our faith. Perhaps someone who is an important part of our life, but who is not a Christian, suddenly says to us that we are mad to have faith, and for a moment, we hesitate ... and then prevaricate! We are then left wondering why it was that we did not defend Christ, as if with our lives!

I suggest that this scenario will happen if our daily life is without any real connection with God during the things we do all the time. Each one of us must make sure that in our work and at home, we consciously allow our Lord to be present with us all the time. Then when we face a challenge, the Spirit will be active within us to respond.

### ***Discipleship 4 (verse 27)***

All disciples are called to build up the church of Christ, not merely by placing ourselves on pews, but by doing God's will. Let us hope that we will not taste death before we have appreciated the building up of the Kingdom of God in our midst; that is, in all of us!

## ***Ideas for what to do***

- At what age do you think you first affirmed that Jesus was your Lord and Master? Think carefully about this, and praise God in prayer for His revelation. If you cannot put a date on this, why not tell Jesus He is your Saviour or Messiah, right now?
- In the course of the coming week, pray each day and make sure that you 'take up your Cross and follow Jesus'. Make a record of what happens and whether you think this prayer makes a difference.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Discuss in your group the different elements of discipleship found in this text. Which of them do you believe to be the most important?
2. Why did Jesus ask the disciples '*who do say that I am*'? What is your answer to this question, if posed to you?
3. Why did Jesus have to suffer in order to complete His mission? Does His suffering continue today, and in what way?

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord God and Almighty Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be our guide, helper, Saviour and friend. May we always be willing to heed His words and learn from all He said, as reported by the Gospel writers. And keep us safe within this troubled world, so that our work and witness and our journey of faith might fruitful for Your Kingdom; AMEN

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