

Denying Self

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus left heaven and humbly denied Himself all things to become God's greatest servant. In Luke 9:23, He said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"*, so if we want to follow Jesus then we also must deny self. The Bible tells us of many great men and women of faith who, like Jesus, denied themselves all things to serve God. These saints humbled themselves and turned their backs on worldly power, position and wealth to serve the living God whom they loved more than life. The following examples highlight the self-denial we are all called to.

Humbling ourself

In Luke 14:7-11, Jesus tells us not to take the best seat at a gathering otherwise the host may ask us to move so that he can give the seat to a more honoured guest. We should take a less important seat and the host may honour us by moving us to a better place. Jesus said, *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 14:11). The first step to becoming a disciple is to be humble because *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"* (1 Pet. 5:5). Denying self starts with being humble.

Power and position

Peter was the leader of the Jerusalem church and a powerful, miracle-working Apostle yet he referred to himself as just a fellow elder. He didn't lord it over his fellow workers but wrote, *"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder ... be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock"* (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Peter put serving others ahead of power, titles and money. Denying self includes treating others as equals and not lording it over anyone.

Probably our greatest example of humility and servant-hood is Moses. We are told in Num. 12:3 that he was *"more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."* At forty years of age, he no longer wanted to be part of Pharaoh's family (Heb. 11:24-27). He chose to leave his great wealth and power in Egypt to become a simple shepherd in the desert for forty years. Then, when he was chosen to lead Israel out of Egypt, he resisted that powerful position but God commanded him to go. Moses was a very humble man who denied himself enormous power, authority and wealth in order to serve God. Denying self includes answering God's call at the expense of all things.

Wealth

Many Christians seek wealth but, in 1 Tim. 6:8, Paul said, *"if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."* Paul had absolutely no interest in money or the things of this world. Writing from prison he said, *"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ"* (Phil. 3:8). The only thing Paul wanted was a greater knowledge of Jesus. Like all the great men of God, power, position and wealth were meaningless to him.

Money can cause terrible problems, even the loss of faith. We are told in 1 Tim. 6:10 that *"the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* We need money for our basic needs but, other than that, the only thing money is good for is giving, either for the Gospel or to help those in need.

Regarding giving, in 2 Cor. 9:7, we are told that *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* and 2 Cor. 8:13 gives the reason for giving: *"Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality."* The generosity of our giving is not determined by the amount we give but by the amount we keep. Jesus praised the poor widow of Mark 12:42-44 because she gave her last two small copper coins, all she had to live on. He said that she had given more than all the others because she had given not out of her wealth but out of her poverty. If what we give doesn't affect our lifestyle then we really have nothing to boast about to anyone, least of all to the Lord. Denying self includes not clinging to our wealth.

Reputation

Because of our pride, one of the most difficult things to give up is our reputation. We are easily offended by what others have to say but we must put our reputation firmly into God's hands, just as Jesus did. 1 Pet. 2:23 says, *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* Jesus didn't allow His pride to rule His actions and, in Matt. 5:11-12, He said that there is a great reward for those who do the same: *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Denying self includes putting our reputation into God's hands.

Finally

Denying self is one of the greatest challenges in our Christian walk. We can't be a disciple of Jesus and love the things of this world at the same time; we must be willing to deny ourself worldly power, position, wealth and reputation; anything we put ahead of God is an idol. 1 John 2:15-16 tell us, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world."* We only have a short time on earth in which we can honour and serve the Lord so let's fight our sinful nature and deny our cravings, lusts and boasting and humbly serve Him while we can.

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