



+ **YOU**

Fall 2024

Thrive: Living on Purpose

**Sermon Title:** Surrendering Our Old Self for New Life in Christ

**To be used with Session 4:** Purpose Lived

**The Point:** We live out our purpose as we are led and filled with the Spirit.

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:24-256, Romans 8:8-9

**Connection with the Study:** To complement the Bible study “Purpose Lived,” this sermon focuses on two passages that define the unique way believers find their purpose in the Spirit. The first passage is from one of the most astonishing teachings of Jesus, as He commands His followers to “deny themselves.” The second is a passage in which Paul commanded us to live by the Spirit and deny the flesh. In both passages, we are reminded that to be filled with the Spirit, we must allow ourselves to be emptied of the cares of this world. In a world where our primary instinct is to seek out things we want and things that make us happy, this call to find purpose in self-denial is astounding. Christianity does not promise worldly successes, but it does promise that when we live by the Spirit, we find so much more.

**Introduction:** It is a known fact that caterpillars are born to become butterflies. Yet I have sometimes wondered if there are any caterpillars out there who are OK with just being caterpillars. Are there caterpillars reluctant to change, afraid of the metamorphosis involved in becoming a butterfly? It does, after all, require giving up everything familiar for something different and uncertain. Some caterpillars out there have probably become good at being caterpillars, and they would be comfortable staying caterpillars. How horrible would it be if the fear of denying themselves kept them from being who they were truly meant to become, a beautiful butterfly capable of flight! Likewise, our calling is to become something we are not now, to leave behind our life in the flesh and embrace beautiful new life in the Spirit.

### 1. Life in the Spirit is to Deny Ourselves (Matt. 16:24).

Many of us have heard this verse before, and so it may be easy for us to read it without a tinge of fear or surprise. Yet to the disciples hearing it for the first time, it must have been a truly earth-shaking statement. They had already denied themselves by choosing to follow Jesus wherever He would lead, but the call to take up a cross was jarring. This command came well before the crucifixion and resurrection, and although Jesus had explained that He must suffer and die in Jerusalem, they did not yet want to accept it. The cross represented a painful and humiliating death that no one would intentionally choose for themselves. The cross was the fate of the worst kind of criminal, not followers of the Messiah! Why would

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Jesus command His followers to take up a cross? Of course, from this side of history, we can see the fullness of what Jesus meant. We must figuratively die to ourselves, deny our worldly desires to walk in our own flawed wisdom, and instead choose to walk in the Spirit, wherever that may lead us. We accept any suffering that may come with this life knowing that the eternal reward far outweighs any momentary suffering, which will only draw us and those around us to the beauty of who Jesus is. Walking by the Spirit keeps us focused on the eternal and not the temporary.

## **2. Life in the Spirit is to Gain Eternity (Matt. 16:25-26).**

Jesus continued with statements that go against every human instinct. Jesus said that we must lose our life to save it, but outside of Christ we would generally assume that whoever wished to lose something would lose it. If we give something up, the things we give up are gone. It is a strange concept to consider that losing something valuable could lead to gaining something more valuable. The beauty of Christianity is that the logic is so counter-intuitive. There is no halfway. Either we are willing to surrender our life to gain a more abundant life than we could ever gain for ourselves, or we remain satisfied with life without Jesus. It is only when we lose our old life that we can find eternal life. Jesus brings it home by reminding us that there is no point in gaining the world if it means we forfeit our very soul to gain it. This world and the things in it are temporary, but our soul will be our core identity throughout eternity. Why grasp at things that don't really matter, things that will fade and fail, when we could be alive and living a victorious life in Christ?

## **3. Life in the Spirit is to Walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8:8-9).**

When we follow the call of Jesus to deny ourselves and live in the Spirit, it is only then that we can truly deny the flesh and its evil desires and walk in truth, grace, and peace. It is a mistake to think that a non-believer can live a good life that is pleasing to God. Paul made it clear that this is impossible. One who is not walking in the Spirit cannot possibly please God. There is no neutrality: one cannot get away with "being a nice person." We are either walking in the Spirit, choosing to obey God, or walking in death, hostile to God and the things of God. In the flesh we find nothing but the death that flesh brings, and in the Spirit we find life abundant. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives that is the indication and proof that their souls are secure, their lives are not their own, and they are devoted to serving Christ and joining Him in His kingdom.

**Conclusion:** We must examine our lives day by day, moment by moment, determining whether we look like a new creation, born of the Spirit, or whether we engage in the same patterns of the flesh that lead to death. The Holy Spirit within us spurs us to daily choose to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. When we walk in the Spirit, our eyes are opened to the kingdom work God is doing around us and we are equipped and strengthened to be a light in a dark world. We are no longer serving our own desires but living in service to the true King of Kings.

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