

Denying Self: Invitation to the True Identity in Christ as a beloved child of God.



A table serves as a welcoming space, where enemies can become friends and strangers can forge connections. Sharing a meal signifies acceptance and fosters a sense of belonging through listening and caring conversations, akin to our neighborhood table. It embodies a humble and welcoming heart. Everyone longs for belonging. Jesus, the Lord of the banquets, extended his invitation to all, inviting them to his table.



At the last supper table of Jesus, the betrayer Judas was there as a friend. Jesus, in turn, washed his feet as a servant. Jesus invites you, whoever you are, to his table of grace. Are you a murderer or an adulterer? There is a seat prepared for you—the table of transformation. Jesus is the server, and he died for you to give you a new identity. If you haven't yet welcomed Jesus, then please come to him.

Today's teaching is most challenging yet liberating one found in Matthew 16:24-25. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'"



Who is the most challenging person to refuse? Perhaps your children, spouse, or grandchildren? Or perhaps it's your boss? They are all difficult to say no to. However, the most difficult person in the world to refuse is yourself. It involves renouncing the centrality and priority of self. It means letting go of selfishness and self-centered thinking in favor of Jesus and the gospel. It's a hard task. Sure, there is self that needs to be denied, such as self-driven desires and wants, attractions, and impulses. The self that every circumstance and relationship thinks

of as "I," "me," and "my." The centrality of you! Self wants to sit on the throne of our hearts. However, the sacrifice of Jesus changes your inherent nature.

Let's have a moment to explore self-denial of Jesus. What aspect of self-denial do we want to explore in Jesus? Forgiveness of sins that we all wrestle with? Let's go to the crucifixion in Luke 23 verse 34. He says, "Father, forgive them." Imagine Jesus hanging between two thieves. Jesus has taken the place of Barabbas, a convicted criminal. He is the most innocent one to ever live. He has taken the place of the criminal. He is between two thieves. One mocks him, the other asks for mercy. Jesus announces that he will be with him that very day in paradise. And Jesus, while hanging on the cross, suffering the most brutal death, prays this prayer, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." Now think about that with me, because they did know what they were doing.

They knew they were crucifying an innocent man. They knew from his reputation, his ministry, his works, where he had served in that city, in that region for three and a half years. They knew Jesus' reputation. They knew of the resurrections, the multiplying of food, and the people that cheered his messages because it brought such life to them. They knew all of that. But yet from Jesus' perspective, they didn't know enough. And so, he said, "Forgive them, they don't get it. They don't know what they are doing."

R. T. Kendall puts it this way. He said he was God as though he were not a man at all, and he was a man as though he were not God at all. So now we have Jesus, the son of man, praying for the forgiveness because he is doing it as God; he can pronounce forgiveness. Jesus, human, is praying; Jesus, God, forgives them. They don't know what they are doing. Internal reality has to be measurable externally in a certain way!



Imagine in your mind's eye the suffering of Jesus that he was experiencing, and he is practicing forgiveness in the middle of that. He didn't wait to come to the conclusion later. It was in the betrayal that he forgave. The criminal said, "Remember me." Jesus crucified because of this man's sin, announces that it is all washed away. And "Today, we will be together in paradise." Intercession on behalf of those that were the most guilty. He prayed. Forgiveness is visible and clearly measurable.

When we forgive someone, I am no longer the victim. I am the victor. If you have the spirit of Jesus, you are willing to forgive instantly. You are eager to forgive the person who persecutes you and hurts you. When we walk in total forgiveness, there is the hope and possibility of experiencing incredible freedom and peace.

Romans 6:4-5 states, "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was."

The Bible clearly states that you died on the cross when Jesus was crucified. However, your mind might say, "Oh, no! Pastor! You are wrong! I still feel very strongly the self in me. It never disappears. It powerfully still works in me." Yes. Right! It is only the shadow of self that Jesus removed on the cross. Jesus never says, "Try harder!" He says, "Give it to me. It is mine, I took all that on the cross. Give it to me!" And you should give it to Jesus. Simple. **When you notice the self-working in you, you give it to Jesus. This means dying to yourself, denying yourself.**

Further, he's inviting us into a radical transformation where we discover our truest identity as beloved children of God. When you received Jesus, the true identity is already put into your heart. You let it live. By giving the shadow or dead husk of self to Jesus, the true identity as sons and daughters of God grows and grows. New life, new humanity, new being is here. It is the life living from His abundant life already given and within us.

There is no trying harder to die to self! It's exhausting, it never works. It's like trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. **The awareness** that you are no longer a slave to sin lets you live a new version of yourself! When you were baptized in Jesus. Self is no longer your nature. Jesus has removed it. All that remains is your attachment through memory to a habit. Which can be broken with the relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit in you is the power that lets you choose with your free will. You can live the freedom given to you! Power and victory are yours. Already given! It implies the union with Jesus.



Let's take an example that Graham brings. Do people who take your household trash away every week, have they ever brought it back? The Lord of the universe, going to these elaborate lengths to put all your sin on My Son, watch His totally gruesome death, have Him be in hell for three days, resurrect Him **to newness of life**, and at the same time resurrect you to live the same life from the old nature? It would make the cross of Jesus of no effect. It would grossly, insanely undermine His wonderful sacrifice.

You are covered by the power of blood and the cross. Until we become the fully powerful children of God, God is daily working, concentrating, and elevating the new man in you. Practicing righteousness is what the beautiful Holy Spirit is coaching you day-by-day, moment-by-moment. It is God's purpose for us. What God has started, God will accomplish!

Give yourself permission to consider yourself dead to self, and fully alive to God in Christ Jesus. You are on the way towards a new man. Pay attention to what you are learning and who you are becoming. And celebrate that! To live alive in Jesus means fully engaging with the Holy Spirit in you! His power is directed towards you in all your daily situations. The Spirit doesn't just give us power to change our behavior - He transforms our very understanding of who we are.



God calls us from our new nature. His power will give you the strength to rise up and continue to walk. It is like a little child learning to walk! A young child, when learning to walk, gathers bumps and bruises when falling over. Tears come, and tears go because they are temporary. Joy is everlasting. A young child does not have the capacity to decide not to walk anymore just because the process is hurtful. There is curiosity, an inherent vibrant expectation, that makes him or her get right back up with a little help from a comforter and start out again. How can you do any less?

This is freedom - not the freedom to do whatever we want, but the freedom to become who we truly are. It's the freedom to live without the exhausting burden of self-promotion, self-protection, and self-preservation. Jesus' call to deny ourselves and take up our cross isn't a call to a life of grim sacrifice. It's an invitation to the most abundant, joyful, free life imaginable - a life where we discover that losing ourselves in Christ means finding true selves in ways we never dreamed possible. There, you start to experience the heavenly lightness, purity, and joy, which only comes from the other realm.