



Preparing for Small Group: Read the passage below, and answer the following questions.

- (1) What do these verses tell me about God?
- (2) What do these verses tell me about sinful humanity?
- (3) What do these verses tell me about Jesus?
- (4) What does God want me to know?
- (5) What does God want me to do?

“Living Now!”
Matthew 16:24-27

Main Point: Living to the fullest comes through fully giving your life to the Lord.

Realizations on living your life to the fullest:

Realize that eternal life is the most important life to gain (26).

The first question that Jesus asked in Matt. 16:26 forces the heart of the issue that’s at stake, which is the answer to the question of what — or, more importantly, who — are you living for in your life? Are you living for this life or for the life to come? Are you living for yourself in this world or for the Lord of this world? The question Jesus asked forces us to either accept or reject the reality of eternal life. If we truly believe in eternal life, then the answer to the question is simple: We don’t gain anything if we lose everything in eternity! If our hearts are still given to this world, then the question should expose the desire for the riches of this world over the desire for riches of eternity. This question is the key. Do you realize that eternal life is the most important life to gain? Are you living in such a way that prioritizes eternal life right now in your life?

1. Read Matt. 16:24-27 again, and take a minute to discuss the first question that Jesus asked.
2. Go through the explanation above, and discuss your answers to each question above.
3. What does it look like to live your life with a priority on eternity?

Realize the priceless value of your eternal soul (26).

The second question that Jesus asked in Matt. 16:26 is meant to lead us to one, simple answer, which is that there’s nothing that you can give in return for your soul! The point that Jesus pressed in asking this question is that your eternal soul is priceless! There’s nothing more valuable that you have or will ever have than the eternal life that God’s given you. There’s no better or more lasting investment that you can make than in your eternal soul. The question Jesus asked should cause us to examine what we’re living for in our lives right now. This question should lead us to realize the priceless value of the soul and the resultant priority of tending most to what’s most lasting in our lives.

1. Read the second question Jesus asked in Matt. 16:26. How would you answer Him?
2. If you could only state one thing, what are you living for right now? Be honest with each other. Share and discuss your answers.
3. What does it look like to tend to and invest in your eternal life?

Realize that living for Jesus means the following (24):

- *Self-denial,*
- *Total submission, and*
- *A life of pursuit.*

Realizing the priceless value of our souls helps to put the words of Jesus in Matt. 16:24 into perspective. These aren't easy words, but they are eternally significant words. If you want to come after Jesus, with the fullness of what that means in life today and life for eternity, then Jesus points to the requirements. They are simple, but not easy. Self-denial is the first thing that Jesus mentioned, signifying a willingness to deny individual wants and needs for the wants and needs of the Lord. Second, Jesus mentioned carrying a cross. The real significance of what the cross represented was the ultimate picture of a life that had been put under total submission to the Roman government. Cross-bearing for the believer is a life that's totally submitted to Jesus, identified with His authority over one's life — even to death. Finally, Jesus mentioned the life of pursuit, following Him! It's not that these are three separate things; instead, it's that these three things are co-dependent. You can't be selfish but submitted. You can't be submitted but going your own way, etc. Jesus is defining true following with these characteristics of true following.

1. Discuss what it means to "come after" Jesus in your life.
2. Take time to discuss each of the characteristics of true following that Jesus identified. What do each of these characteristics look like in your life? Share and encourage one another.
3. Pray for each other for true following in your lives. Pray for those who need to truly follow!

Realize that fully living comes through truly giving your life to Jesus (25).

So how does one gain this life that Jesus called His disciples to live? The paradox of the faith is that the abundant and full life that God created us for only comes when we abundantly — fully — give our lives to God! In fact, anything less than giving God everything only ends with losing anything that we ever hoped to gain in life. The implication of these words of Jesus are on the eternal life that He came to give as well as the current life that His followers live. The hard questions that follow point to the weight of this eternally significant paradox of the faith.

1. Allow one of two people to share their testimony of when God led them to the point of true surrender to Jesus, making sure that they share how that changed their lives.
2. In what ways do people try to "save" their own lives? What are the usual results?
3. Who needs to hear these words of Jesus this week? Pray for them, and commit to share!

Realize the eternal consequences that are on the line in the life you live (27).

If there was any doubt that there are eternal consequences in life, Jesus resolved that doubt with His clear words in Matt. 16:27. When He comes back, He's coming to judge, and every person will be repaid according to what he/she has done. That thought should be terrifying. It should stir up desperation for a Savior to save us from our sins. It should remind us of the indescribable grace of God in Jesus Christ, who bore the payment for our sin on the cross! Without that, there's nothing that any of us deserve except for judgment for the sins we've committed. Realizing this is critical to understanding the importance and the eternal consequences that are on the line in the lives that are lived today, and this should motivate us on the mission of Jesus!

1. Think about the people who need Jesus that you've identified and prayed for today. Why is it important to share with them about the judgment and the eternal consequences of sin? How would you do this in your conversation with them?
2. Go back and read Matt. 16:21-23. Why did Jesus say these words right after what happened in verses 21-23?
3. Take time to praise and worship the Lord for His grace to us in the gospel!