

DYING TO LIVE

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The Refresh Challenge Series – Week 4

Sermon Notes

Scenario:

A newly wed husband discovers that his newly wedded wife has a new birthday gift he wasn't aware of from her ex-boyfriend, a smartphone with a postpaid line which he has promised to maintain. He angrily asks her to give it back. She says its Gods provision for them and feels he's being unreasonable.... seeing we're all love experts! What would your advice be to the lady with the phone? DISCUSS...

- a) Keep the phone – it's your life after all, and your new husband is just being jealous! He needs to get over it!
- b) Since you need to be sensitive to your new husband, keep the phone but only use it in the office as your office line where he won't have to see it!
- c) That phone needs to be crushed into little bits – ran over by a car, and the pieces you scrap off the floor thrown into a dustbin!

This is a common scenario

We see it all the time in our Ndoa class, where we equip couples planning to get married and enrich the marriages of couples who are already married. How much of my old self should I give up in order to be married to this person? What is reasonable and which areas are off limits? Should my spouse for example know what I earn or how much money I give to my parents? Should we have a joint account or should each person manage their own finances? Are there things about me that my spouse has no right to meddle with? Should I keep some secrets to myself? What if I trust this person with everything and they take advantage of me? When it comes to marriage, how much is too much?

Everyone struggles with giving up their freedom

These are not easy questions and many couples struggle to find satisfactory answers. I dare say that many couples here today have not yet reached satisfactory answers! And perhaps there are those here who are not yet married because you are not willing to compromise on your freedom and your way of life. But married or not, did you know that we all face similar challenges when it comes to our relationship with God? Generally, we want to connect with God. That's why we're here! We want to receive His blessings. We want to know the purpose we were created for! But how can I do this in a way that works for me? What if God asks me to give up something I'm not ready to give up? What if following God leaves me poor or looking weird or fanatical? We want to get practical today: **When it comes to following God – how much is too much?**

That's what we want to talk about today! For our visitors, we're going through the #RefreshChallenge, a 12-week challenge that will ignite our passion for God and help us impact those around us. The Refresh Challenge is happening primarily in our small groups, and then each week, in our services, where we discuss the key things we are learning. If you are a visitor, or have not yet signed up for a Refresh group, you are most welcome to do so at the end of the service at the sign-up desk right here on your right.

When it comes to following God, how much is too much? The Bible has a great story about some people who wanted to connect with Jesus. Please turn with me to **John 12:20-23 READ NIV**

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone

who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Greeks want to see Jesus

So our story begins with some Greek people who wanted to see Jesus. In those days, even though Rome was the political capital of the world, Greece was the cultural capital, the nation of Alexander the Great. The Greeks were seen as sophisticated people. Everyone spoke Greek, in fact, most of the New Testament is written in Greek. And so these sophisticated people are on a mission to see Jesus. Why do they want to see him? We don't know. Just before this, Jesus had come in triumphantly into Jerusalem, with the whole crowd cheering for him and proclaiming him king. Maybe they were **curious** and wanted to see if he was the real deal. Perhaps they had heard about his miracles, including raising a man from the dead, and they wanted to **sign up** to be part of his organization. Perhaps they had **issues** that they thought he could help them with. Perhaps as sophisticated people, they wanted to **add** this famous man to their networks; to be seen with him – if it was today, it would have been to take a selfie with him and post on their social media page. Whatever the case, they approached one of the disciples to request for an appointment

The disciples must have been excited! The world was finally coming to see what they had known for a while. Their guy was becoming famous. Not only had their whole city just said he was a king, now even sophisticated foreigners were seeking audience with him! They must have been so excited when they went to tell Jesus, ‘guess who’s looking for you now!’

Jesus goes Strange on them

And that’s why Jesus’ reply must have sounded so strange to them. Jesus talked about a kernel or a seed. He picked the most popular crop around, wheat, but the principle holds true for what we grow in this area, mangoes. This is a mango seed (display photo on projector). This one seemingly insignificant seed has the capacity to produce fruit for forty years. The only catch is this, for this seed to become all that it was meant to be, it must sacrifice itself, and die. Deep inside every seed is an embryo of living tissue. The rest of the seed, encased in the outer shell, is designed to do one thing - feed, protect and eventually sacrifice itself for the embryo. When conditions are right, and the embryo has absorbed enough moisture, the rest of the seed dies. The outer shell, and almost everything it contains, having served its purpose, breaks opens and dies.[1]

Die to Self

What Jesus is saying here is this, if you want to follow me, if you want to have the life that I intend for you, if you intend to sprout and be fruitful - just like this seed, you must surrender everything about you, even your life to God’s control. Unless you surrender everything to God’s control, God’s purpose for your life will never be fulfilled. What I hear Jesus saying here is the greatest paradox of the Christian life - **Unless you die to self, you will never truly live!**

Death is Taboo!

One might argue that Jesus did not have to use such graphic language to people who were just looking to connect with him! Jesus’ Jewish culture, very similar to our own contemporary African culture, is very squeamish and uncomfortable about death. We don’t talk about it, we don’t think about it, and even when terminally ill, we shy away from writing wills! And this is understandable. Death is hard, bloody, messy and, always painful. It is a rude and uninvited guest. It takes everyone –rich or poor, weak or strong – everyone is a victim, and it comes with such finality, there is no court of appeal or mitigation. It’s no wonder we don’t like to talk about it or even mention it!

Mizizi Weekly Reading

This week in our Refresh readings, we came across **Galatians 2:20**, which says *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* There is a dangerous fallacy that our generation has come to believe. Unfortunately, it is a lie that has been taught widely by the church today. It says that I can accept Christ, but choose whether or not to surrender to him. That I can say the salvation prayer, but still remain in control of my relationships, my marriage, my career, my money, and my choices. My life, my choice!

Total surrender= Dying

But what Jesus is saying here is that the cost of following Him is total surrender: A surrender so complete that it can only be equated with dying. Dying here means that you bring all your dreams, desires, plans, habits, relationships, family, possessions - everything you have, before God, and say, "I surrender it. It's now under your complete control. All that I am and all that I am I bring it to you. I trust that your plan for me is better than my plan for myself. Wherever you tell me to go I will go and whatever you tell me to do I will do." Jesus is saying, **unless you die to self, you will never truly live!**

But wait - what if I really don't want to die? What if there are some things in my life that I want to hold on to? Jesus goes on to say (v.25) *'the man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'*. In other words, the more you hold on to your life and your way, the more you are holding on to an illusion, to something that you cannot take with you. Here is a little clip I found fascinating. (VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqulsu3BlIE>)

Isn't that crazy? I was so shocked when I saw it! Here's the even crazier thing about that video...

ROPE ILLUSTRATION – imagine this rope goes on forever. Imagine it is a timeline of your existence. You see this red part? This would represent your time on earth. You've got a few short years here on earth and then you've got all of eternity somewhere else. And what blows me away is that some of us, all we think about is this red part. 'Oh man, I can't wait till here... I'm going to work hard and save, save, save so that I can really enjoy this part right here'. You're consumed with it, 'will I drive the car I want, travel to see the world, during this part?' – are you kidding me? What about the rest of your timeline? It's crazy because the bible teaches that what I do during this red part determines how I exist for millions of years into eternity! [2] And Jesus says it plainly, **unless you die to self, you will never truly live!**

The same is true in marriage! So what then does it mean to die to self? Three things come to mind. On your seats when you came in, you will find 3 **pieces of paper**. As we go through each paper, I would like you to take a moment and reflect. Is there an area you would struggle really hard if God asked you to give it up? If there is, write it down on that piece of paper. Hang on to it, and I'll tell you what to do with it at the end. The first section is...

PAPER #1. DYING TO WHO I AM

When you become a follower of Jesus you are under new management. It's like joining the army. If you were to join the army today, you would need to hand in your national ID card and take on a military ID, meaning you are now under a completely different code. In a sense, you lose your identity, get a haircut, put on a uniform and obey your commanding officers. This is what God calls us to do - surrender ourselves wholly to His code.

So let's diagnose: what is the 'you' that you would find difficult to surrender to God? Maybe it's **control** – the need to always be in control of how things turn out. Write it on your sheet. Maybe it's **pride** - placing yourself first above others, or thinking you are better than others. Write it down. Or perhaps it's **bitterness** – the feeling that others have hurt you and unwillingness to let that go. Write it down. Maybe your issue is a **low self-esteem**, or a **habit or addiction** you have. Or perhaps it is **suspicion of authority** – you just don't trust anyone else to tell you what to do. Or maybe it's your **image** – how you look to others is really important to you. Or it's your **recreational activity** like clubbing or riding your cool bike, and you know these distract you from pursuing God.

KEYBOARD PLAYING – ‘withholding nothing’. You know yourself, take a moment and ask yourself, what is it about ‘who I am’ that I would struggle or have struggled to surrender to God? The second section is...

2. DYING TO WHAT I HAVE

In Matthew 19 Jesus met a rich young ruler who wanted eternal life, but was so defined by his possessions that he was like ‘I’ll follow you Jesus but don’t ask me to give up my money!’ The very blessings God had given him kept him from surrendering to the giver of the blessings.

So let’s diagnose: what is it you have that you would find difficult to surrender to God? Is it **money**? Is it your **career** or your **business**? I’ll follow you Jesus but please don’t touch my business! Is it your **possessions**? Your house or your car or your toys? Maybe it’s things you don’t have now but you are working towards - your **dreams and aspirations**. You know yourself, take a moment and ask yourself, what is it about ‘who I am’ that I would struggle or have struggled to surrender to God? The third diagnostic section is.....

3. DYING TO WHO I HAVE

In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus says *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”* What is Jesus saying? No other relationship in our life can ever be as important as our relationship with him. We must be so totally committed to him that every other relationship, including that with our spouse and children pales in comparison.

So let’s diagnose: are there any relationships that you would refuse to leave behind if God asked you? Maybe it’s your **spouse**, or your **children**. Maybe it’s a **dating relationship** or **desire for marriage** – it’s like Lord, you can ask for anything but don’t touch that one! Maybe it’s your attachment to your **parents** or **siblings** or to some of your **friends**.

You know yourself, take a moment and ask yourself, what is it about ‘who I am’ that I would struggle or have struggled to surrender to God? Jesus’ word to us today is the same one he gave to his disciples and to the Greeks, **unless you die to self, you will never truly live!**

We have crosses and a coffin here in church today. I appreciate that coffins are a very taboo topic in our culture, and there may be some here who may have some recent trauma around the subject of death. My desire is not to be flippant, irreverent or disrespectful of either your culture or your recent experiences. What I do want however, is for each one of us to understand the gravity of God’s call to us - the call to follow Jesus is not a cheap call, it costs. It calls for death; in other words, total surrender to the Lord. It is a call to let go, and let God. Unless you die to self, you will never truly live the fruitful, purposeful life that God created you for. Allow me to invite you to finish jotting down areas of your life that God wants you to die to. Once you are done, I want to invite you to walk up to one of the coffins, and take a look inside – at what you are leaving behind. At the foot of the coffin you will find a bin at the foot of the cross. Place your paper in that bin as a sign of surrender, and dying to it. Then proceed to your seat. There are some of you for whom the trauma is still very real, allow me to invite you to write down on your piece of paper your grief, your hurt, your pain; and ask him to give you strength to join the rest of us in this exercise. God is here, and I believe He wants to do something special in the hearts and minds of all who would surrender themselves to Him.

PRAYER

- **Salvation** – do not follow God on your terms. Do not be a good person. You must surrender your entire life to be a follower of Jesus
- **Surrender** - Christians living un-surrendered lives

RESOURCES:

[1] <http://www.cupofwrath.com/bible-questions/john-12.24.php>

[1] ROPE Illustration by Francis Chan - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jF_x8dsvb_4