



Lent Day 5, February 26, 2012 Sunday Follow Me

Then he said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" Luke 9:23-25

These verses will set the foundation for this week's focus on the topic of self-denial. To be honest with you, I have not been looking forward to studying this topic this week. I knew it was going to require some soul searching on my part, and let's face it, in American culture, there isn't much that promotes self-denial. Every ad I listen to on TV or read in a magazine, pretty much screams, "Indulge yourself--you deserve it!" Our government is trillions of dollars in debt, and many Americans are drowning in debt themselves, as we can't seem to say no to whatever whims and desires pop into our heads. It's very easy to fall into that way of thinking. So let's take a deep breath and jump in!

I looked up the word *deny* from verse 23 in the [Blue Letter Bible](#) to see what it had to say about its meaning. *Deny* is transliterated *aparneomai*. One of its meanings is "to forget one's self, lose sight of one's self and one's own interests." This hits us where it counts, doesn't it? Most of the decisions we make are based on what is best for us. Actually, on the surface, there's nothing wrong with this. We pass on the second slice of cake, because it's not good for us, or we don't watch a movie so that we can get up the next morning and be fit for home or work. We need to look at this on a deeper level by taking it into context with the rest of the sentence to understand its full meaning.

Jesus says we are to do the following: 1. deny ourselves 2. take up our cross 3. follow Jesus.

When we look at all three of these things together, the meaning becomes clearer. The study notes in my Bible (The Spirit-Filled Life Bible) on this passage say, "To deny oneself is not to assume some false, external asceticism, but to put the interests of the kingdom first and foremost in one's life. To take up the cross does not mean to endure some irritating burden, but to renounce self-centered ambitions. Such self-sacrifice results in eternal life and the fullest experience of kingdom life now."

What this requires of us is making our decisions based on a higher purpose than "Will this further my position in the world?" to "Will this further my work in God's kingdom?" This will affect just about everything in our lives.

It makes us look at where we work, how we spend our money, and how we spend our time in a whole new way.

Notice, I am not saying that you must work for a Christian organization in order to fulfill these verses, or that you can't pursue a hobby because it has no direct spiritual connection. No. The meaning of these verses is a very personal thing meant to be hashed out between you and God over the course of your entire life. You can take two people and have one who devotes his or her entire life to starting or working at a Christian organization and then take the second person whom God is directing to work in a secular organization and be a light there. **Both are fulfilling these verses, because they have both sought God's direction and listened.** Just remember, God will never direct you to do something that is contrary to His word.

What is the result of living this way? God tells us in the above verses that "whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." As we submit our will and desires to God's, He will replace it with abundant life and a peace that passes all understanding. This doesn't necessarily mean an easy life or that we will perfectly understand every situation we find ourselves in. And we will at time mess up, do what we want, and then have to repent and get back on track. But it does mean we will live a life of incredible meaning, purpose, and, I think, joy as we follow Him.

Application:

If you don't already do this, before you make decisions that regard your job, your money, your time, give your desires over to the Lord and seek His guidance and direction. Don't rush into a decision. It may involve asking yourself some hard questions.

- Do we purchase a bigger, better house or remain where we are and maybe make a few improvements?
- Is my desire to move up in the company in line with God's plans for me?
- Do I need this new electronic toy or designer purse?
- Should I join this club?

Your answer may be yes. God may have plans to use that big house because you have a marvelous gift of hospitality. It may be no, because he knows that right now He wants you to stay in your current neighborhood. Either way, learning to deny our wishes and seek His first is a way to live the abundant life He wants us to live.

Prayer: Lord,

It's never easy to set aside my own desires and wishes. My self always wants to assert itself, thinking that it knows what is best for ME. Help me to put your plans first. May I seek You, listen to You, and obey You. Amen.