

Series: G-R-O-W-I-**N**-G in Christ  
Message Title: **NO**—Denying Yourself  
Date: Sunday, May 21, 2017  
Scripture: Luke 9:23-27  
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

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## Introduction

Today we are going to examine one of the most foundational and fundamental truths of basic Christianity. This is the starting point of authentic discipleship.

“And He said to all, ‘If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels’” (Luke 9:23-26 ESV).

Christ is the focus of our faith. As a result, His words and teachings are at the core of all faith and practice.

There is only one type of Christianity—biblical Christianity. There is only one kind of Christian—a Christ-follower. So we start here. This is not some advanced view of the Christian faith; it is the most functional application of faith.

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23 ESV).

“deny himself”. Say NO to nominalism.

This is quite a difficult challenge in an indulgent world.

Denial means NO! Have you ever been denied anything in life?

As Christians we are called to a faith of denial in a designer world of personal choice and indulgence. Oftentimes we want to treat faith like Pandora jewelry—build your own with a variety of colors, experiences, memories and fashions.

For the next few weeks, we are going to examine the word, *denial*—a word that has to

work in us as we grow in Christ. It is the need for NO to grow.

We are building upon our G-R-O-W-I-N-G  
acrostic:

**G**race

**R**enewal

**O**bedience

**W**itness

**I**njury

**N**o!

**G**

“A growing Christian knows that the way to avoid a marginal life is to develop a life with margins.”

So here is not the finish line, but the starting point for faith, growth and discipleship. Denial is a counter-intuitive and contradictory command in life—to deny self, take up your cross daily, and follow Christ.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:24 ESV).

The gospel is a call for self-denial, not self-fulfillment!

To this end, this statement of Jesus is an affront to much of the contemporary gospel that emphasizes “gain” and “gold” because of God.

A man-centered faith focuses on how God benefits us, but a God-centered faith pushes us to see the greater gain of giving our lives for the glory of God.

“Sacred Schizophrenia forces believers to fight their ‘false self’ that grapples for personal fame, glory, possessions, power and comfort. The true self, however, exhibits self-denial and a Godward focus. The denying self loves real life that lasts forever, loves Jesus as all-satisfying, loves meaning more than money, loves the praise of holy heaven more than the praise of sinful earth.”

—John Piper

So this is the starting point of the gospel and the essential principle behind Christian discipleship—denial of self!



## The Profession That Demands Denial of Self

"Now it happened that as He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him. And He asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.' Then He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered, 'The Christ of God'" (Luke 9:18-20 ESV).

"Who do men say I am?" Do you ever wonder what people say about you? ... talking behind your back? Do you ever ask friends?

Who is Jesus? Who do *you* say? Is Jesus an "accessory" for a better life or is He the essential reality that changes the entire orientation of your life?

"Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18 ESV).

“He said to them, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins’” (John 8:23-24 ESV).

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already” (1 John 4:1-3 ESV).

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:11-12 ESV).

Jesus holds exclusive place as Savior—the Mediator between God and men.

“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22 ESV).

“It is impossible to be wrong about Jesus and right with God.” —Warren Wiersbe

From this statement regarding His own death, Jesus then calls for a discipleship involving cross-training—a daily recognition of life in Christ and for Christ instead of self.

Jesus came to redeem us. This redemption means buying out of the slavery of death and giving us life through His death. We can't have two masters—self and Christ.

“Jesus laid down stern requirements for discipleship. We must first ‘Say No’ to ourselves—not simply to pleasures or possessions, but to self—and then take up our cross and follow Christ daily. This means to be identified with Him in surrender, suffering and sacrifice.” —Warren Wiersbe

Denial of self is not mere asceticism (Buddhism, Hindus), but rather it means a deeper affection for Christ than anything else.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46 ESV).

“field...pearl”—high risk for greater reward.

If you come after Jesus, it will cost you—not just something, but everything. Any gospel that preaches more of you with a minimum of Christ is no gospel at all. It is a false and fatal confession of faith!

In Rome, there was an imperial cult regarding the Caesars—Caesar is Lord. The Apostle Paul brought a striking contradiction in this thought.

...“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and



is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Romans 10:9-10 ESV).

Jesus is Lord!

At age eighty-six, Polycarp, the second-century bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the Apostle John, was brought to the Roman authorities and ordered to confess that Caesar is Lord. Although doing so would have saved his life, Polycarp refused and was murdered, inspiring others to remain faithful.

## **The Principle That Drives Denial of Self**

Take up your cross daily.

The cross had the same association then as it does today—death! At the time of crucifixion, the offender was required to carry his own cross.

“And as they led Him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus” (Luke 23:26 ESV).

“When Christ bids a man to follow, He bids him to come and die.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20 ESV).

Baptism demonstrates Galatians 2:20. That is why it is the first public action, demonstration, and profession, “Not I, but Christ.”

Self-denial and denial of self aren’t the same thing. Self-denial focuses on an object—I will resist in partaking. But denial of self is the release of life for the purpose of Christ in me.

Look at this principle in several other places in Scripture:

“For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has

been set free from sin... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:5-7, 11 ESV).

... "and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15 ESV).

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" (Philippians 3:7-8, 10 ESV).

But there is an outcome for the crucified life. We often say, "Finders, keepers; losers weepers." But Jesus says, "Finders, losers; keepers, weepers."

The issue is not for loss, but for gain! The Principle: Gaining comes through losing.

We think of gains that come through gathering, but Jesus says to His followers that gaining comes through losing. That means the tighter we hold on, the greater the risk of loss. The sooner we release for Christ, the quicker the realization of gains.

Biblical Christianity = Christ's life for mine. My life for Christ.

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21 ESV).

In the end, we gain through our losses for Christ. Many are making a bad bargain (trading this life for the moment) only to see it all gone in eternity. As believers, we trade this moment in time to gain and share His glory in all of eternity.

This is the inescapable principle of the Christian faith: What I hold and hoard, I lose; but what I give and release, I gain. We gain by losing!

## The Practices That Demonstrate Denial of Self

Let's go home—a family filled with servant-hearted care.

Read Ephesians 5:22-6:4. This passage is an entire sequence of attitudes and actions based upon a desire to not assert self, but to serve one another.

There can be so much banter and focus on self-fulfillment in a family. How do we make everybody happy? The fact is, we are to choose a different set of attitudes. As followers of Christ, we serve others.

### *Wives*

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior... However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:22-23, 33 ESV).

Few words can rival the Bible's call to submit. Submission does not mean the husband is

to dominate, demean or disregard his wife. There is no place for abuse and neglect in a marriage. But it does mean the wife aligns her life in a way that honors and encourages leadership in her husband.

### *Husbands*

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25 ESV).

Give it up for her! Love steps back to honor, care and provide for the object of love.

### *Children*

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise)" (Ephesians 6:1-2 ESV).

"Honor" Don't despise, disrespect or dishonor parents.

Let's get to work! Read Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1.

Good workers are people who show a selfless service for the good of all. Your greatest

responsibility at work as a follower of Christ is not greater gains, but giving greater honor.

Let's talk about church! Our great goal is not to see how many people we can gather, but how many people we can reach. This is not me speaking to them, but you reaching them with gospel conversation!

*Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly...  
Let me learn by paradox  
that the way down is the way up,  
that to be low is to be high,  
that the broken heart is the healed heart,  
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,  
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,  
that to have nothing is to possess everything,  
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,  
that to give is to receive...  
Let me find Thy light in my darkness...  
Thy joy in my sorrow,  
Thy grace in my sin,  
Thy riches in my poverty  
Thy glory in my valley.  
Thy life in my death.*

—A Puritan Prayer, *The Valley of Vision*