

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 29, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

DANGEROUS FOLLOWSHIP

“Deny Thy Self”

Luke 9:23, Genesis 2-3, Mark 10, Philippians 2

Our study of “Dangerous Followship” will take us on a journey on what it mean to really... genuinely follow Jesus. This journey will lead us through Jesus’ words in Luke 9:23 and the three specific element/ingredients that Jesus gave for discipleship or “followship,” as we are calling it.

3 Specific Ingredients Dangerous “Followship”: When Jesus spoke of genuine “followship” in Luke 9:23 He described it like this, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* He gave us three specific ingredients of genuinely dangerous followship:

- 1. Self-denial... “Deny himself”** - This involves a decision that one makes at the deepest level of one’s will. The term “deny” means “to say ‘no’ to something,” and in some instances “to refuse someone.” It is the word used to describe what Peter did to Christ in John 13:38. However, this is only a small part of its meaning. In a broader sense it means “in every moment of life to say ‘no’ to self and ‘yes’ to God... to dethrone self and enthrone God... to make Him the ruling passion and principle of that life,” Constant self-denial is the life of constant assent to God, expressed by giving in and submitting to Him. *Is this dangerous? Why?*
- 2. Cross-bearing... “Take up his cross daily”** – In the day that Jesus spoke these words, the cross was not unfamiliar to His hearers... for just outside of Jerusalem’s wall was the infamous Place of the Skull (Golgotha or Calvary), where people were crucified for capital crimes. When the citizens witnessed a person dragging a timber (the horizontal cross beam) through the streets, they knew he was soon to die. It was in this context that Jesus spoke these words. Essentially, He was saying, “If you want to be My disciple (follower), spiritually you must die to self. You must prefer My will to your will and must give up what you want to do with your life, allowing Me to become your preeminent focus.” We are talking about dangerous followship here. *Is this dangerous? Why? Do we do this?*
- 3. Faith-following... “Follow me”** – At the heart of these two words is the thought of actual obedience... obeying Christ (the leader) and emulating His words and behavior... following by faith, each step He takes. We give lip service to this kind of obedience to Christ, but do we really obey His Word to us, do we really follow his every step?

As strange as it may seem, your worst enemy is with you wherever you go. Even when you go to church, he/she follows. He/she has sung hymns, read the Scriptures – even bowed his/her head and prayed right along with you. Yet he/she hasn't sat in front of you or behind you or beside you... instead, he/she has sat in your very seat! His/her name is "Self," and "Self" can become the greatest enemy a genuine Christ-like life and really following in Jesus footsteps. The Apostle Paul called him the "old man." Chances are you have probably cursed and hated him often, while at other times you have sought to please, exalt, and even protect him. He/she is afflicted with a disease called "selfishness," "self-centeredness," "ego," "pride," "self" which demands to be satisfied and is the opposite of "selflessness"... required for genuine fellowship

Let's be honest, most of us would say and perhaps correctly "I am not a selfish person." Yet, given the human propensity and right opportunity each one of us has the potential to act more on behalf of "self" than to consider others. Fortunately, the disease of "self" and selfishness is not incurable, but can be treated... and absolutely must be treated if we are to be "conformed to the image of the Son," Jesus Christ, and follow Him in genuine discipleship/fellowship. Just as a doctor would study a sickness in order to learn how to treat it, so we need to examine certain manifestations of selfishness and "self" before we can adequately cure it and begin to live a healthy Christian life of self-denial.

Before digging into a study on self-denial and dealing with self in our life, let's get a foundational perspective on what exactly we are called to as followers of Jesus Christ... Christians.

I. A FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON DANGEROUS "FELLOWSHIP"

A. What does God desire of the life of a Christian? To be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Couched in the grand declaration of assurance in **Romans 8:28-29** is a brief, yet foundational statement about what God desires to do in the lives of His people.

Look at these verses carefully even though they are familiar;

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

In regard to Christian, God is committed to one major objective: to conform them to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

B. What does God desire for the life of a Christian to look like?

Well, what is the "image of His Son"? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in **Philippians 2:5-11**;

"(Let this mind be in you...) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to

be grasped, but made himself nothing (self-denial), taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!(cross-bearing) (vv.5-8)

Christ, Himself, explained it very simply when He declared His primary reason for taking on a sinless human nature;

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mt. 20:28)

Characteristics of the Christian Life:

1. **Self-denial - serving others**

2. **Cross-bearing - giving of yourself for others**

**Can you see how genuinely following Jesus might promote genuine fellowship?*

**C. How does God desire for this to be accomplished in the life of a Christian?
Genuine, dangerous fellowship... following, emulating His example... being like Jesus, conforming to the image of Jesus**

II. A PERFECT PICTURE OF SELF-LESS MAN (Genesis 2:15-25)

In Genesis 2 we find the first picture of human life devoid of selfishness given in Scripture. There we read about the Garden of Eden – a place of unimaginable beauty and perfect innocence. In such an environment, God created a man and a woman and brought them together in an ideal marriage. The relationship they enjoyed is simply expressed in verse 25, *“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* The Hebrew word for **“naked”** in this context means **“to be laid bare”** or **“poured out completely.”** Their relationship with one another was fully transparent; they were open and unguarded in every way toward each other. The Hebrew term translated **“no shame”** or **“not ashamed”** carries a reciprocal idea here which means **“they were not ashamed before one another”** or not **“self-conscious.”** Adam and Eve experienced an innocent, non-defensive relationship. Between them there were no hidden areas; all forms of resistance were lacking. Selfishness was no yet born into human life. There were selfless and other-conscious rather than selfish and self-conscious... each was completely engrossed in the other rather than in themselves... how beautiful that God created us that way... to be other-conscious rather than self-conscious. So were did “self-consciousness” come from? Hum!

Observations on “Self” From The Garden:

1. **No need for self-concern... God concerns Himself with our needs** – Becoming self-concerned and self-conscious can come on us when we think “no one cares,” “no one understand,” but that is simply not true according to the overwhelming record we have in God’s Word. The one who created it all and created it all by His mere spoken word does care and He sees. **1 Peter 5:7**... great verse, *“Cast all your care upon him because He cares for you.”* Every care... He really does!

2. **No need to be self-consumed... God provides for our needs** – God will provide all that we need. We don't really have to look out for our own best interests. God already has that in mind. **Philippians 4:19** says, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."*
3. **No need for self-focus... God focuses on us and our needs** – We are free to focus on others. Because God cares about our needs and provides for our needs, we don't need to focus on ourselves, but we are freed up to care and focus on those around us as His hand and feet. Being used by God to care for and provide for the needs of others to His glory is what He has called us to. Why self-denial? So we are free to focus on Him and others rather than ourselves.

III. A MARRIED PICTURE OF SELF-CENTERED MAN (Genesis 3:1-12)

When sin came into the Garden, an event that radically affected all of human history, self-less man was changed. In direct opposition to God's command, Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:1-6, see Gen. 2:16-17). And when they did according to **verse 7**, *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."*

Results of Sin in Man:

1. **Preoccupation with self** - The first result of their sin was not rebellion or hostility but a sudden preoccupation with themselves... self, as shown by their shame over their nakedness. Each immediately began to look out for number one... for "themselves." **verse 7**, *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."* Put another way, they became self-centered rather than other-centered. Consequently, they tried to cover up their unclothed bodies.
2. **Pulling-away of self** – Particularly a "pulling-away of self" from God and from others. If Adam and Eve's sudden preoccupation with self was not enough, they also tried to hide themselves from God. **Verse 8** says, *"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden."* The very garden that was created by God for their good pleasure, they turned into a sinner's hideout! Then the all-knowing God called out to Adam *"Where are you?"* (v.9), that is *"Why are you trying to conceal yourself?"* And Adam responded in **verse 10** by saying, *"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."* God's penetrating reply/question to Adam was, *"Who told you that you were naked?"* (v.11a). In other words, "When did you get so self-consumed and self-aware that you were suddenly began to focus on yourself and how you look." Until sin shattered paradise, Adam and Eve were so other-conscious that they were completely unaware of their own physical condition. But now that had changed. That led to the third result of sin.
3. **Preservation/Protection of self** - When God confronted Adam about his newly acquired self-centeredness, Adam hurled the blame toward Eve and even the Lord Himself in **verse 12**, *"The man (Adam) said, 'The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.'"*

What we see in this account of the first human sin has since been reenacted in countless ways throughout human history. Sin brings with it a preoccupation with self and a withdrawal from a concern for others and from God. Self-centeredness, self-protection, and self-exaltation characterize a life away from God and one who does not follow Him. We all exhibit these traits because we are all sinners, but God has provided a path for change and calls all who would follow him to the opposite... a life of self-denial, which mean a life of preoccupation on God and others rather than on self.

IV. A PICTURE IN CONTRAST BETWEEN SELF AND SELF-DENIAL (Mark 10:35-45)

After innumerable generations of sinners, a virgin named Mary miraculously conceived and gave birth to a unique individual – Jesus Christ. He was entirely without sin, thus, completely unselfish... selfless in fact. Jesus truly lived a life of self-denial. The kind of self-denial He lived was not a reclusive asceticism, but a willingness to obey His Father, serve others, and suffer – even die and give up His own life. Self-denial was a common thread in Christ’s teaching to his disciples (followers) (see Luke 14:26-27, Matthew 10:38 and 16:24, Mark 8:34, John 12:24-26). He gathered around Himself twelve sinners whom He chose to personally disciple and teach them what it meant to really follow Him... genuine followship. Two of these followers, James and John, were brothers and former fishermen. (READ: Mark 10:35-45)

3 Contrasts Between Self and Self-denial:

1. **Self will demand its own way (agenda)... self-denial has no agenda but following Him and serving others.** One day James and John came to Jesus in all of their and made a request of Him, found in Mark 10:37, “*They (James and John) replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other are your life in your glory.’*” Jesus first told them that they did not know what they were asking for (v.38a). They came with a “self-centered agenda.” Give us a place of prominence and authority over others. Make us look good and more important than all the others. We want success, power, prestige, prominence for ourselves. John the Baptist said of Jesus, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30) (NIV “*He must become greater; I must become less.*”)
2. **Self will cause a faulty or skewed vision... self-denial will create an accurate perspective and vision of God and who He is** – Selfishness and self-centeredness always has a skewed vision because it’s motive is based on self and what will promote self. Genuine followship of Jesus operates with no motive but His with the understanding that it’s all about Him, not us. Jesus directly answered the request of James and John by saying in verse 40, “*But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.*” In other words, “Guy, you aren’t seeing clearly here! God owes us nothing and what He does in His Kingdom is His Sovereign business not ours. Truly following Jesus means we have Him and His ways in mind... not our own. Our vision is not our own, our wants, our wishes, our desire, our rights, our plans, our agenda, but His vision, His plans, His wishes, His agenda.
3. **Self will promote disharmony and division... self-denial will propagate unity and harmony** – Self-centeredness and looking out for our own self-interest will almost

always cause and promote division and disharmony... jealousy and envy follow. It has at its core the creation of such, because self wants to be exalted above others. Following Jesus in self-denial should open the doors of ministry, outreach, service and care to others not close them. When the other disciples heard this dialogue between Jesus and James and John it created a divisive problem **verse 41** says they *“became indignant with James and John.”* So Jesus called the twelve disciples to come closer to Him, and he began to give them some illuminating counsel on servant hood. Listen close to his instruction in **Mark 10:42-45**, *“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (put others first... self-denial), and whoever want to be first must be slave of all (slaves had not rights to self). For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (ultimate picture of self-denial).”* The world system works through intimidation, abuse of power, and self-centered drive. But genuine follower of Jesus Christ are not to operate this way. They are to live the lives of “followship,” sacrificing themselves and their possessions for others just as Christ, the Son of God who became the son of Man, did.

V. **AN ESSENTIAL PICTURE OF A LIFE LIVED IN SELF-DENIAL (Philippians 2:3-4)**

The Apostle summarized this timeless teaching on self-denial well when he wrote in **Philippians 2:3-4**, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Paul give us here an essential picture of a life lived in Christ called “self-denial”... essential in genuine, but dangerous followship.

Self-denial Check-list:

1. **[] Are my actions motivated by selfish ambition in any way?** What do we mean by “selfish ambition”? The Greek words translated here as “selfish ambition” is sometimes rendered “strife” because it refers to factionalism, rivalry, competition (winning over others), speaks of the pride that prompts people to push for their own way. We might call it the desire to get ahead and be above or before others.
2. **[] Is there even a hint of vain conceit in me in regard to this situation?** What do we mean by “vain conceit”? Literally the Greek here is “empty glory,” and often translated “empty conceit.” This word refers to the pursuit of personal glory, which is motivated by selfish ambition (or the desire to get ahead, or push ahead of others)
3. **[] Am I adequately removing “me” from the equation?** Paul says “in humility consider others.” The world says don’t lower your estimation of yourself, don’t be anyone’s door mat, don’t let others walk all over you. The word translated here as “humility” is sometimes translated as “lowliness of mind.” This translates a Greek word that Paul and other New Testament writers apparently coined. It’s not found anywhere else in the Greek language other than in the New Testament. It was a term of derision, with the idea of being low, shabby and humble. Paul perhaps in mind here the idea that we are not to first consider ourselves in matters, but think of others and their needs as more important than our own.

4. [] **Have I considered the effects this will have on those around me and other people?** Paul said, **“...consider others better than yourselves...”** Literally “to esteem.” The Greek word means “to lead” or to “lead before the mind, to suppose, to consider, to esteem.” In other words in your mind to put them in the lead ahead of yourself. We might say that in my mind I am going to consider others before I consider myself in this matter.
5. [] **Am I more concerned about me or others in this?** Here is how Paul said it, **“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** Not only am I going to consider how this might affect others, I am actually going to look out for their interest in this. I am going to make sure this make for their best, for their building up, for their edification, for their good.

***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me.” -Jesus (Luke 9:23)***