

FINDING LIFE

And what it takes

By

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“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24).

The concept of self-preservation was strong in the minds of the apostles. When Jesus told of His forthcoming execution, Peter declared, “This will never happen to you.” Jesus replied, “Get out of my sight, Satan, for you are not judging by God’s standards, but by man’s” (Matt. 16:23).

In our security conscious generation these words of Jesus are easily forgotten. People are preoccupied with “finding” themselves, finding a “meaning” to life, and learning how to survive and find “success” in a world of sin. Like Peter, they are judging by man’s standards, not God’s.

Jesus calls us to lose our lives for His sake. What does this mean, and how are we to do it?

Losing self is to give up our way of looking at things through the eyes of the world, and, as Jesus said, to judge things by God’s standards and not man’s. “Self” refers to one’s whole being. It includes our thoughts, desires, ambitions, preferences, and the way life is ordered and directed. It must all be abandoned, so that we can think the thoughts of God, desire what He desires, and have as our ambition the doing of His will. We are to learn to love what God loves and hate what He hates, that our preferences will coincide with His.

When one compares himself with Jesus he can see how unworthy he is in spite of his talent, skill and good character. Like the apostle Paul, after his conversion, one must admit that his accomplishments, his social standing and his pedigree, however grand they may appear on a resume, must be counted as garbage in order to “gain Christ, and be found in Him,” and to “know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:8–10).

To lose self and die to the world was not the advice of some dreamer who couldn’t make it in the real world, nor of a psychologist inspired by Freudian principles. It is diametrically opposed to the philosophy one would expect in modern halls of learning. It also is out of favor with much of the philosophy that prevails in the church, where methods of “church growth,” dictate the teaching. But it comes from The Christ, the Son of God, in Whom abides all truth, and Who has the keys of death and Hades.

Success with God is seldom, if ever, that which is labeled success in the world. People often think that they must be meeting God’s approval because they are meeting with success in their endeavors. The crowds are pouring into their meetings. Business and income are increasing. Popularity is growing. “I must be doing something right.” Not necessarily. Jesus warned, “woe unto you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). “That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). He asked the religious leaders, “How can you believe, who receive glory one of another?” (John 5:44).

Yet, Christians all too easily are captivated by the world's honors, and seek such honor for themselves. If you are a preacher or a teacher, stop trying to win notoriety and approval. Jesus wants humble servants, not superstars. While the gospel is a treasure in earthen vessels (mortal people), it is the **message** that is the treasure, not the clay vessel. The vessel should reflect the message, and that message is Jesus, Savior and Lord. Just as a vase should not detract from the exquisite bouquet it holds, so the messenger must not detract from the message. His life is to be lost in the light of Christ and the gospel.

Christ's precept, to lose one's life for His sake, can be taken seriously only by those who have complete faith and confidence in God. To place full confidence in God is to place *no* confidence in the flesh. What a far cry from Jesus is the modern hype about this *dynamic* speaker and that *powerful* leader. If what they offer is due to *their* power, then it is worthless. What we need is that which is wrought by the power of God, and this is done through those earthen vessels who have heeded the words of Jesus to lose themselves for His sake.

What is called "Christian" has been so secularized that to many it has come to mean little more than leaving the world's routine for an hour or two on Sunday to go to church. But when Jesus called for followers, He described the kind of people they would be: they who are "poor in spirit," "those who mourn (over sin)," "the meek (not the weak, but certainly not the glory-seekers)," "they that hunger and thirst after righteousness (not hankering for material things)," "the merciful, and "the pure in heart (meaning having undivided purpose)." (Matt. 5:3–8). He waned of persecution, and advised that one should count the cost, because being a Christian requires losing self.

It is faith in Him, a faith that enables us to lose self for His sake, that leads to success in His eyes. That faith may flourish in the worst of times when to the world we are the least successful.

At present there is a movement, spearheaded by prominent evangelical leaders, to find "common ground" with the secularists, and to work with them for political and social concerns. The hatred which the world has towards Christ and His moral standards is now so intense that few even bother to try to hide it. This is the logical result of a world in rebellion against the Creator and His purpose. In such a world a Christian must experience tribulation, constant temptation, rejection, ridicule and sometimes outright persecution.

The solution is not in trying to find common ground with the enemies of Christ. Rather, it is in dying to self, to so surrender all of life and its desires to God that there is nothing the world can do to defeat you. The world cannot take a life already given up to God!

The commercial spirit which prevails causes some to think of Christ's words only in terms of losing possessions. However, Jesus was not talking to the rich, but to those who had already "left all" to follow Him. One may be financially poor, and yet just as selfish and rebellious as his richest neighbor. It is not our possessions that God wants, but ourselves.

Peter writes that we are redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood — the very life — of Christ (I Peter 1:18, 19). For our sakes Jesus gave Himself, and our response, if we are to follow him, should be no less than to yield our lives to Him.

We lose our lives for His sake when we quit trying to satisfy ourselves by what the world offers and are satisfied with that which God offers. We lose our lives as far as this world is concerned when we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than seeking what makes us feel good. We lose our lives when we give priority to His commandments instead of the popular concepts of man,. When we shun man's esteem in order to please the Father, and when we abandon what the world calls the "good life" in order to be called good and faithful servants by our Lord.

And what is the outcome for one who gives life fully to Christ? "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abides by itself alone: but if it die, it bears much fruit. He that loves his life loses it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal...If any man serve me, him will the Father honor" (John 12;24-26).

The world despises those who are not deceived by its false honor and glory. But of what value the emoluments and praises of man compared to the honor to be given to his servants by the almighty Creator?

And that isn't all. When one follows Christ, he gives all that is temporal, including his life, in order that he may receive all that is eternal, including immortality in the image of God.

"He that loses his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

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