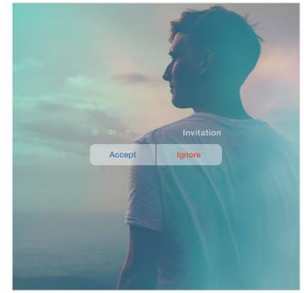


Deny Yourself

Throughout the gospels, there are many places where Jesus calls or invites us to something, but He leaves it up to us to decide whether we'll accept His invitation or ignore it. Let's look at five invitations Jesus extends and ask ourselves how we'll respond



INTRODUCTION

Jesus gives this invitation in Mark 8: 34: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Jesus is inviting us to JOY BEYOND ALL IMAGINATION. This invitation is the path to joy.

STARTER QUESTION

1. Have you ever thought of some people being called to perform their Christian life at the professional level and others, maybe yourself, to be on the team but performing at the pee-wee league level? Does it matter... why or why not?

INTO THE WORD

2. Are you surprised to learn these words of Jesus, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and daily follow me" appear several times in the Bible (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23)? How would the meaning of these words have been understood by his disciples? How does this compare with what Jesus said in John 15: 1-8?
3. Where in the Scripture can we find lists of behavior that we should deny? Refer to Galations 5: 19-21 for an example and Proverbs 10-11 for comparisons of righteous behaviors versus behaviors that God detests.

APPLICATION

4. What is your reaction to these words from Jesus to deny yourself? How does this command from the Gospels put you on a path to healing sorrow and ultimate joy?
5. What is a serious threat to your relationship with Jesus? Take a minute to confess this to Jesus and ask him to replace it with a joy-filled relationship.

PRAYER

Lord, You are all-knowing and all-wise. You know what is best for your children. I confess my sin for holding on to behaviors that are not pleasing to you. Please help me to deny the parts of me that are not a reflection of you. Please help me to take up my cross and experience the path to joy. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

Question 1:

Pastor Smith makes it clear this is not a distinction made by Jesus or in the Bible. The call to all believers is to deny themselves and follow Jesus.

Question 2:

The people of that day knew that taking up the cross meant you were about to be executed and carrying your own was a form of submission to the power of Rome. Jesus was talking about the heroic effort needed to follow him daily to do his will even when the work is difficult, and the future looks bleak. Pastor Smith goes on to say that taking up the cross of Jesus will require us to give up the right to hold on to any part of our life that does not reflect Jesus.

In John 15: 1-8, Jesus gives the analogy of Him being the vine and God being the vineyard keeper who removes the branches that are not producing fruit. We are the branches, if we remain in Jesus (deny ourselves and follow Him), we are fruitful. Without Him, we will not be fruitful....we will wither and dry out. God is glorified when we are Jesus' disciples and are fruitful.

Question 3:

Galatians 5: 19-21 – Actions produced by selfish motives such as: sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, idolatry, drug use, casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, jealousy, drunkenness, partying, etc.

Proverbs 10-11 – God detests: deceit, cheating, foolishness, laziness, hate, lying, pride, dishonesty, untrustworthy, slander, cruelty, etc.

Question 4:

Go back to the verses from Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23 and read the verses that follow to understand how fruitless it is to gain the world for ourselves and lose our souls. These verses and today's message can help us see the importance of faith and trust in God to keep us close to his will for our lives.

Taken from Pastor David's sermon notes – to deny yourself is to:

1. Find yourself in Jesus,
2. Defy the devil,
3. Understand that you may be rejected by society, and
4. Heal your sorrow.