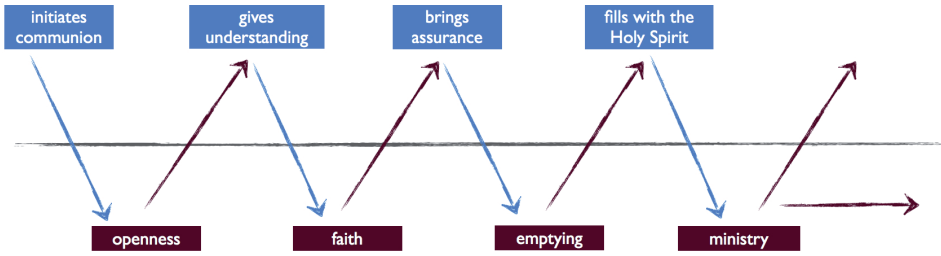


UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU



connect to reflect

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNION: 4

dying to self

knowing our identity in Jesus, we will abandon everything to him



the challenge to believe

The disciples had given up their livelihoods and friends to follow Jesus. They probably imagined they had given up everything. But when Jesus discusses that he is going to die they became angry (Mark 8:31-33). It appears that death was not part of their understanding of the call of God. What parts of your life do you have difficulty giving up completely to God?



deepening dependence

Spend some time in prayer and meditation before God. Ask him to identify the parts of your life that need to die, and make a commitment to make a sacrifice of whatever it is.



steps for re-connecting our hearts to God

1. Ask the Holy Spirit what he wants you to learn from this lesson. What do you sense the Holy Spirit teaching you?
2. This week, what practical steps do you need to take to apply what the Holy Spirit is teaching you?
3. What evidence will you see that indicates that you are successfully applying what the Holy Spirit is teaching you?



passing it on

- INTERCESSION** Who can you pray for that they may learn to become a living sacrifice?
- WORDS** With whom can you share the significance of dying to self?
- CHARACTER** How will living as a sacrifice be characterised in your life?



opening to God's words

When sin entered the world, it corrupted human nature. Therefore, our challenge is not simply to stop doing wrong things, but to deal with a corrupted human nature that instinctively craves what is opposed to God.

We can become deceived if we think that our main problem are the specific sins we commit. We can easily become frustrated by trying to stop specific sins while failing to address our sinful natures that produces those sins. Imagine a factory producing poison. We can try and destroy all the poison that is produced, but it is far better to destroy the factory that is producing the poison as well.

The Israelite tabernacle explains how to address this problem. At the heart of the morning and evening services in the tabernacle was the sacrifices. At each service, a one year old male lamb was killed, symbolising the death of Jesus who would die in the place of sinners. As this service took place twice a day, every day of the year, it symbolised that the continual consecration of God's people was dependent on the sacrifice of Jesus. While the sacrifice was a symbol of Jesus, it was also symbolic of the sacrifice we make of ourselves to God in response of what Jesus has done for us (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Jesus clearly explained the cost of such discipleship, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) This was a call to death—to stop doing whatever it was that was preventing them from picking up the cross, and follow him. Jesus was not going to wander around with a heavy burden on his back. The cross had only one purpose—death. Like the daily tabernacle sacrifices, Jesus' call here is nothing less than a daily call to give *everything* we have and are to him, for otherwise our corrupted human nature will regain control of us.

According to Paul in Romans 12:1-2, what is the purpose of becoming a living sacrifice? Why is death necessary to achieve this purpose? Why might this be difficult to do if I am not sure I am secure in Jesus?

As you will see in the next lesson, more happened to the lamb than just dying—it was completely burned by divine fire from the altar. In the same way, becoming a living sacrifice (also called dying to self, or becoming empty) is for a further purpose. We also must be completely consumed with divine fire. Spiritually speaking, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that replaces the corrupted human nature with the divine, and must be done every day. Death, or emptying must come first, because you cannot be filled with something new when the old has not been emptied. Or put another way, there can be no resurrection to new life unless we have previously died.

It may be tempting to think that once we put our faith in Christ, we are given a new nature and so we will not sin anymore. In this area, we need to be careful

that we do not fall into false teaching.

When Jesus first comes into my life, I begin to see the gravity of sin and I am disgusted by it. Before Jesus entered, I wasn't bothered by sin, but now it seems as though a war now breaks out within myself. Like Paul, "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate." (Romans 7:15 NLT). But why is this happening if I have given my life to Jesus?

The Christian life is not magic. The promises I make to Jesus to follow him are not magical spells which suddenly transform who I am by the wave of a wand. Although I have given myself to Jesus, and his Holy Spirit is guiding me, the nature of Jesus in me will only be revealed to the extent that I have died to self. That is why Paul encourages us to put to death the sinful nature (Romans 8).



"When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This is not something that is done once, but every day. This is why Jesus calls us to "take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23) and Paul writes "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). Every day there must be a fresh death to the sinful nature else it will rise up again. This state of death is not merely a verbal contract we make with God but a real experience we must go through in prayer. Moreover, it is a death I am only willing to do once I am secure that I am God's child.

Such dying to self is necessary if we want to reflect Jesus. In his book, *Absolute Surrender*, Andrew Murray observes that the goal of the Holy Spirit's work in us is to glorify God by reflecting Christ:

When God gives the Holy Spirit, His great object is the formation of a holy character. It is a gift of a holy mind and spiritual disposition, and what we need above everything else, is to say: "I must have the Holy Spirit sanctifying my whole inner life if I am really to live for God's glory (9).

Murray affirms that our problem in achieving this is rooted in our nature:

Why is a lamb always gentle? Because that is its nature. Does it cost the lamb any trouble to be gentle? No. Why not? It is so beautiful and gentle. Has a lamb to study to be gentle? No. Why does that come so easy? It is its nature. And a wolf—why does it cost a wolf no trouble to be cruel, and to put its fangs into the poor lamb or sheep? Because that is its nature. It has not to summon up its courage; the wolf-nature is there (16).

As my own nature is so corrupted by sin, Jesus is not looking to modify my nature—he is looking to replace it completely with his own, as soon as I die.

dying to self in the writings of Ellen White

1. Until self is laid upon the altar of sacrifice, Christ will not be reflected in the character. When self is buried, and Christ occupies the throne of the heart, there will be a revelation of principles that will clear the moral atmosphere surrounding the soul (Letter 108, 1899, MS 1903.)

2. We must be emptied of self in order to give room to Jesus, but how many have their hearts so filled with idols that they have no room for the Redeemer of the world. The world holds the hearts of men in captivity. They center their thoughts and affections upon their business, their position, their family. They hold to their opinions and ways, and cherish them as idols in the soul; but we cannot afford to yield ourselves to the service of self, holding to our own ways and ideas, and excluding the truth of God. We must be emptied of self. But this is not all that is required; for when we have renounced our idols, the vacuum must be supplied. If the heart is left desolate, and the vacuum not supplied, it will be in the condition of him whose house was "empty, swept, and garnished," but without a guest to occupy it. The evil spirit took unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they entered in and dwelt there; and the last state of that man was worse than the first. (RH, February 23, 1892 par. 4)

3. Have we humbled ourselves before God, that the Holy Spirit may work through us with transforming power? As children of God, it is our privilege to be worked by his Spirit. When self is crucified, the Holy Spirit takes the broken hearted ones, and makes

them vessels unto honor. They are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. ... Unless this converting power shall go through our churches, unless the revival of the Spirit of God shall come, all their profession will never make the members of the church Christians. There are sinners in Zion who need to repent of sins that have been cherished as precious treasures. Until these sins are seen and thrust from the soul, until every faulty, unlovable trait of character is transformed by the Spirit's influence, God cannot manifest himself in power. There is more hope for the open sinner than for the professedly righteous who are not pure, holy, and undefiled. (SW, December 5, 1899)

4. God will breathe this life into every soul who dies to self and lives to Christ. But entire self-renunciation is required. Unless this takes place, we carry with us the evil that destroys our happiness.

I wish we could be what God would have us,—all light in the Lord. We need to reach a higher standard. But we can never do this until self is laid on the altar, until we let the Holy Spirit control us, molding and fashioning us according to the divine similitude. (ST, October 11, 1899)

5. Those who work for God are daily to empty the heart of self, that they may be cleansed of their hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong. They are to depend wholly upon Him who taught as never man taught. Unless the soul-temple is daily emptied of self, and prepared for the reception of the Holy Spirit, self will rule the entire being. The words and acts will be tarnished with selfishness. Christ will not appear in

the life; but there will be seen a self-confidence that is wholly different from his character. (SW January 29, 1903)

6. Why is it so hard to lead a self-denying, humble life? Because professed Christians are not dead to the world. It is easy living after we are dead. (Messages to Young People 127 Testimony for the Church January 6, 1863)

7. Self is prominent. When self is crucified, then this sensitiveness, or pride, will die; until then you are not a Christian. (2T 572)

8. When self dies, there will be awakened an intense desire for the salvation of others, which will lead to persevering efforts to do good. There will be a sowing beside all waters; and earnest supplication, importunate prayers, will enter heaven in behalf of perishing souls. There will be an earnestness, a persistency, that will not let go. Love to Jesus will lead to ardent love for the souls of our fellow-men. (RH, July 22, 1884)

9. It is necessary that the will should be sanctified. In surrendering the will, the root of the matter is reached. When the will is surrendered, the streams that flow from the fountain will not be bitter, but will be as pure as crystal. The flowers and fruit of Christian life will bloom and ripen to perfection. (ST, October 29, 1894)

10. When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish

for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. (DA 324)

11. You have repeatedly said: "I can't keep my temper." "I have to speak." You lack a meek, humble spirit. Self is all alive, and you stand guard continually to preserve it from mortification or insult. Says the apostle: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Those who are dead to self will not feel so readily and will not be prepared to resist everything which may irritate. Dead men cannot feel. You are not dead. If you were, and your life were hid in Christ, a thousand things which you now notice, and which afflict you, would be passed by as unworthy of notice; you would then be grasping the eternal and would be above the petty trials of this life. (2T 425)

12. We are forming characters for heaven. No character can be complete without trial and suffering. We must be tested, we must be tried. Christ bore the test of character in our behalf that we might bear this test in our own behalf through the divine strength He has brought to us. Christ is our example in patience, in forbearance, in meekness and lowliness of mind. He was at variance and at war with the whole ungodly world, yet He did not give way to

passion and violence manifested in words and actions, although receiving shameful abuse in return for good works. He was afflicted, He was rejected and despitefully treated, yet He retaliated not. He possessed self-control, dignity, and majesty. He suffered with calmness and for abuse gave only compassion, pity, and love. (3MR 427)

13. The Christian life is a battle and a march. But the victory to be gained is not won by human power. The field of conflict is the domain of the heart. The battle which we have to fight--the greatest battle that was ever fought by man--is the surrender of self to the will of God, the yielding of the heart to the sovereignty of love. The old nature, born of blood and of the will of the flesh, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The hereditary tendencies, the former habits, must be given up.

He who determines to enter the spiritual kingdom will find that all the powers and passions of an unregenerate nature, backed by the forces of the kingdom of darkness, are arrayed against him. Selfishness and pride will make a stand against anything that would show them to be sinful. We cannot, of ourselves, conquer the evil desires and habits that strive for the mastery. We cannot overcome the mighty foe who holds us in his thrall. God alone can give us the victory. He desires us to have the mastery over ourselves, our own will and ways. But He cannot work in us without our consent and co-operation. The divine Spirit works through the faculties and powers given to man. Our energies are required to co-operate with God.

The victory is not won without much earnest prayer, without the humbling of self at every step. Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily

submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. The will must be placed on the side of God's will. You are not able, of yourself, to bring your purposes and desires and inclinations into submission to the will of God; but if you are "willing to be made willing," God will accomplish the work for you, even "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5. Then you will "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Philippians 2:12, 13. (MB 142.)

14. The Lord permits trials to come to us in order that we may be cleansed from earthliness, from selfishness, from sharp, unchristlike traits of character; that we may be led to look to him as the source of all strength. He suffers the deep waves of affliction to pass over our souls in order that we may have deep heart-longings to be cleansed from all defilement, and come forth from the trial purer and holier, with a deeper knowledge of him.

"As many as I love," God says, "I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent," In order that we may die to self, we are called upon to endure trial, and when the chastening hand of the Lord is laid upon us, we are not to fret and complain, not to rebel, not to worry ourselves out of the hand of Christ. We are to humble ourselves before God, pleading with him to give us rest and peace. We enter the furnace of affliction with our hearts darkened by selfishness; but if patient under the crucial test, we

shall come forth reflecting the divine image, as gold tried in the fire. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (ST, December 10, 1896)

15. Those who are enamored of this religion of fancy do not relish the idea of destroying the old man with his deeds, and bringing into subjection every rebellious thought to the dominion of Christ. They do not desire to submit themselves to the control of the Spirit of God, which works in the human heart to expel every corruption and to establish vital principles of virtue, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and Christlike love. Yet those who receive the Spirit of God, though they were dead in trespasses and sins, will experience the active working of that power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The vital power of the Holy Spirit will raise up those who realize their helplessness, and who come confessing their sins and believing in Jesus. (ST, November 5, 1894)

16. You need not be worried. You need not be thinking that there is a special time coming when you are to be crucified. The time to be crucified is just now. Every day, every hour, self is to die; self is to be crucified; and then, when the time comes that the test shall come to God's people in earnest, the everlasting arms are around you. The angels of God make a wall of fire around about and deliver you. (UL 283.)

17. In a view given June 27, 1850, my accompanying angel said, "Time is almost finished. Do you reflect the lovely image of Jesus as you should?" Then I was pointed to the earth and

saw that there would have to be a getting ready among those who have of late embraced the third angel's message. Said the angel, "Get ready, get ready, get ready. Ye will have to die a greater death to the world than ye have ever yet died." I saw that there was a great work to do for them and but little time in which to do it. (EW 64)