

Self-Denial

Second Series – Sermon Twenty-Three

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Here again, in “Self-Denial,” as we work through the end of series two, MacDonald is calling us to the practical aspects of this life in relationship with Them. He is calling us upwards from our small selves, with our wishes and wants, to our high calling in Jesus Christ. Divine Life is our eternal destiny, and the selfish self is in conflict with this destiny. So, to follow Jesus is to leave ourselves behind!

Denying self is not merely to say no to ourselves in what we want, but to deny the “self” itself with all its deciding powers! Jesus came to do the will of His Father, and by sharing His yoke with Him, we learn how to live in our True Self as He lived in His! Self-denial is not about controlling the self, punishing or starving it but turning our back on it and walking into the Light.

Outline

Self-Denial - To express the sum of the universe in a word is to awaken to “Jesus!”

Deny, not Control - We feed self-satisfaction through attempts to achieve and attain control.

Yielding as Denial - Denying self is to yield the “self” itself with all its deciding powers!

The Father’s Yoke - This yoke is revealed only to those who do as He did and live as He lived.

Jesus’ Yoke - The one we must share in obedience with Him as we learn of and from Him!

Joy - In the end, our Father will give us joy, the one joy of the universe is the presence of God!

Difficult Forsakings - Good souls, many will one day be horrified at the things they now believe about God!

Luke 9:23-24 MSG

Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat—I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"

Self-Denial

Jesus is the way in and the only way out of slavery, consciously or unconsciously, into liberty. He is the way from homelessness to the HOME we desire but cannot find. Home in the peace of the Father's heart!

To picture Jesus clearly, we need not only endless metaphors but sometimes opposing ones. He is not only the door to the sheepfold but the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus is not only the way, but the leader of the way; not only the rock that gave water in the wilderness, but the living water itself! We must humble ourselves as little children and let Christ be formed in us. Learn from Him that He is in us, doing first what He wants us to do and revealing what He wants us to be. **We must not merely do as He did, but see as He saw and think as He thought. We must take the will of God as our very life, not trying to get our own way or caring what others think. The world and its ways must mean nothing to us.**

Let me explain what I mean by the world. When I speak of it, I do not mean the world God thinks and makes, much less the one the human heart lives within, but the one man makes by the perversion of his nature. A world apart from and opposed to God's nature. By the world, I mean all the ways of judging, regarding, and thinking, whether political, economic, ecclesiastical, social, or individual, that comes not from the Divine Heart. Ways which are not God's ways of thinking, regarding, or judging. Those that are not taking His will and life into account and care nothing for the truth of them. But those according to the practices and customs of men and their view of time.

We must turn from everything that is against the thinking and teaching of Jesus. Turn from the world in the heart of the best of us, especially the world in our own heart, and follow Him. **The first step in any progress is to leave something behind. To follow Jesus is to leave ourselves behind. "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself."** (Matthew 16: 24 KJV).

Deny, not Control

Some think that to deny yourself is to go against your desires, tendencies, and inclinations because they are yours. We believe that something is gained by abstinence from what is pleasant or by doing what is unpleasant, a benefit for denying your lower nature in itself. I cannot say what might benefit someone, but the point isn't man's rule or self-control, but God's rule.

However devout, man's rule rouses the danger of pride in its self-control which is far worse than even the unchained animal of self, the demon self. **True victory over self is the victory of God in man, not the victory of man over himself. It is not just about being under control, but being in harmony with God! Whatever we do without God must fail or succeed miserably.** It is not about man's will controlling his heart or spirit, for God created us as a whole.

In achieving self-discipline, we create a new problem- self-satisfaction, in which we fuel pride, the root of all sin. Succeeding in things God does not require of us, we put ourselves in the place of God. We become a law-giver in ourselves, one who commands, not one who obeys. This satisfaction with ourselves is the dangerous appetite of the self which feeds the one we think we are killing.

For a man to be his own schoolmaster is to be in a perilous place, and the only progress possible is in the wrong direction. To enjoy cheerfully, thankfully, and heartily what God wills is to live rightfully regarding the lower things of the world. To live by our own invented laws is false and can only come from rebellion.

The purpose of self is not to frustrate and tease the poor thing but to leave it altogether. That is to yield it, deny it, refuse it or lose it and thereby save it! The self is given to us that we might sacrifice it. It is ours that we, like Christ, have something to offer. Not that we should torment it, deny it, or be angry with it, but that we should utterly abandon it and render it powerless!

Yielding as Denial

What can this mean? We are not to frustrate it, but abandon it? How can we abandon it without frustrating it?

It means we must refuse self altogether as a ruling or determining power in us. It is no longer the umpire of our actions. "What would my Father have me to do?" **Yielding ourselves wholeheartedly, without struggle or regret, is not merely to deny the Self a thing it wants, but to deny the Self itself, to refuse and abandon it.**

The self is God's gift. Only it must be the "slave of Christ" so that the Son can make it free. The time is coming when it shall be possessed, enlarged by God's living presence. **The self will have learned to receive with gratitude, demanding nothing, and turning no more upon its own world, or be no more a minister for its own good. God's eternal denial of Himself, which was revealed in Jesus as He took up His cross daily, will have become our life and the gift of himself to God and his fellows.**

To deny one's self is to act no longer from the ground of self. That is to allow no personal influence between the self and the will, no grasping or seeking the independent will's expression for worthiness, ambitions, or the praises of men. To deny the self is to allow no community, country, person, or relationship to turn us aside from following God, but forsake them all as a ruling power in our lives. We must do nothing to please them that would not first be pleasing to Him.

Right deeds and true words and not how they are received will be our concern. Not merely will we not love money, trust in it, or seek it as the labor of life. But, having any or not, we must never think of it as a windfall from events or change of circumstances, but as the gift of God. We must receive our life by

looking up and acknowledging that every moment comes from God, the causing life, and living One. It is God who feeds us, warms us, and quenches our thirst.

The will of God must be our all-in-all. The Father's life must be our joy and that we live from Him every hour of every day. To know God as the center of all life is to deny ourselves and take Him instead. To seek Him is to begin the denial; to follow Him who never sought His own is to deny all anxieties and fears.

When we are young, we must not care about what the world calls failures. As we grow old, we must not care that we cannot remember, grieve the loss of what we can no longer do, or grow miserable because we become weak or ill. We must not care about any of this. We are one with the God who can, not limited by the self that cannot. We are one with eternal Life, the Father of our spirit, and not dependent on the being we could not create and for which He cares. He is our concern, and we are His. Our concern is to do His will and deny ourselves. His concern is to give us all things.

The Father's Yoke

To this self that I must deny, I do not need to consult you but consult the One whose idea is the soul of you. It is not you that I must answer to, but your Source—the One who caused you to be. You may be my consciousness, but you are not my being. For my life is hidden with Christ in God from where it came and to where it will return. Good-bye, self! I deny you and will do my best every day to leave you behind.

And in the leaving, we must not fail to see, or in seeing ever forget, that, when Jesus tells us to come to Him, follow Him and believe in Him. He speaks first and always as the Son of the Father. He is the Son of the Father, the obedient one who came to do the will of His Father. The messenger who delights in doing the will of Him who sent Him.

At the moment He says "follow me," He is following the Father, determined to do His will. There is no other way to think of Him or believe in Him.

To believe in Him is to do as He does, to follow Him where He goes. We must believe in Him in the practical, everyday life, as He believes in His Father. Believe as the One in whom we must follow out of this body into eternal Life.

It is not to follow Him in any theoretical way, hold this or that theory about why He died or His atonement. These things are revealed only to those who follow Him, doing as He did, living as He lived. There is no other way to follow Him. Jesus was all about His Father, and so should we be, for there is no other way to follow Him. To follow Him is to learn of Him, to think His thoughts, use His judgment, see as He saw, and feel as He felt. To have His heart, mind, and soul, this oneness and nothing less is denying one's self and following Him as His disciple.

Jesus' Yoke

Being busy day and night doing great things for Him in any other way will earn you the reception, "I never knew you." When Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you," He does not mean a yoke He would put

upon our shoulders. It is His yoke He tells us to take. The one He is currently carrying, the one His Father gave Him. This yoke is the one in which we learn of Him.

The will of the Father is the yoke He would have us take and bear with Him. It is this yoke that Jesus says, It is easy, of this burden it is light. He is not saying, "The yoke I lay upon you is easy, the burden light:" what He says is, "The yoke I carry is easy, the burden on my shoulders is light." With the garden of Gethsemane before Him, with the hour and power of darkness waiting for Him, He declares His yoke easy, His burden light. He does not magnify Himself. He denies Himself and takes up His cross, and tells us to do the same. The Father magnifies the Son, and the Son does not magnify Himself; the son magnifies the Father.

We must be fiercely protective of the Father against ourselves and keep careful watch over the cunning and deceitful self. It is always cunning and deceitful until God enlightens it. Dishonest until it is entirely denied and the Father becomes our all-in-all; until we leave it empty of self-will and power and God is seated there, not the sanctuary of Self, but a transmitter of Divine power. Until it is empty of self, it's very denials, it's turning from selfishness for the sake of Christ, will tend to promote its own conceit and create greater pride. While it is not denied but only frustrated, we may, through our satisfactions in self-discipline and its victories, empower the Self even more. When the Self finds it cannot honor because of its gifts, self-love, conquests, and the praises of others then it will please itself with its thoughts of surrender, its unselfishness, its devotion to God, and its self-Sacrifices for His sake. We may not call ourselves, but will soon feel ourselves, to be saints, superior creatures, looking down upon the foolish world and its ways, walking above it all, dreaming a dream of self-deception. This dream is self-worship, yielding and concentrating on the world's approval and dismissing the consideration of others. Even those they began by serving are no longer necessary to the assurance of its worth and merit! **In a thousand ways self-deception will make a fool of our selfish selves. Jesus sought not His own will and ways but only the will and ways of His Father. This would be a hopeless task for us if it were not that He comes Himself and dwells in us!**

While the ideal of self-denial is an absolute one, we must consider it a continual one of daily and unrelenting self-denial. It is a more profound and more challenging thing to accomplish than one single herculean effort can achieve. For our wills are not completely free until the Self is totally denied. It takes a long time for the living waters from within to fill every corner of our being, subduing everything to the Spirit. That is of uniting us spirit, soul, and body until we are delivered from every kind of disease and bondage to corruption into the liberty and glory of the children of God. Every day until then, we must take up our cross. Every hour we must carry it. Our birthright lost for a mess of pottage, and what Satan calls nothing, may be of eternal significance.

Many Christians who have begun well still spend a lot of effort to hold on to harmful things between Christ and our dear Self. That is, seeking to save what we must lose! It is one thing to have our beloved self delivered from hell, its hate, horror, and disappointments. It is quite another to yield it to the conscious possession of the living God Himself, who can raise it to its true self in freedom and Life. When Christ within us pours out, then, indeed, we are saved, and then we will live!

Here is the promise Jesus gives those who will leave all and follow Him. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it." (Matthew 16: 25 NAS). What words of men or angels can dimly shadow this glorious hope, that is, the hope of losing ourselves in the salvation of God's heart! To no longer care for ourselves, but rest in God's care for us, resting in His divine Love!

When we speak of a man and his soul, we imply a self against a self, reacting to each other; we cannot divide ourselves this way. It was never the Lord's intent to explain things to our logical understanding, nor would it be in the least helpful. We need a metaphor, a word or symbol that allows us to think about higher things even though the symbol is far from a perfect one. An accurate metaphor always represents more than it can say. More as the heavens are higher than the earth. The heavenly revelations are higher than their earthy signs.

Joy

There is no joy belonging to human nature that will not be a hundred times greater to the one who gives of himself, though, in doing so, he thinks he is yielding the very essence of his life. To surrender oneself is to give up grasping for things by bypassing their true source. Surrender is receiving them directly from God, their Source, even though we know not how.

The independent self receives the Father's gifts as if they just fell into his hands. He then perceives himself to be a slave of chance and his own blundering endeavors. Yet, he is always complaining as if someone else is responsible for the problems he meets at every turn. However, the good he receives, he gives no thanks, for who is there to thank? But, at his disappointments, he complains, there must be someone to blame! He does not think there could be a power of any consequence to help sustain him after his desires and meager existence!

How could a God pour out His being to sustain the trivial wants of His creatures? No world could ever be built or maintained on such an idea of life. It is for His children to inherit the earth. Those who will not be His sons and daughters cannot possess. The time is coming when all art, science, animals, and nature will be subject to man, as man is subject to the Father. This nobility of everything will be the delight of the sons and daughters of God.

Confidently, we say that we are not to love God for the sake of what He can give us. No, it is impossible to love Him except that He is our good and beautiful God. In the end, our Father will answer us with joy, for joy is the harmony of the Spirit! Our good Father created His children to be joyful and enter into this joy, and we must be like Him.

The heaven of Christ is the loving of all, a forgetting of self, and a union with each and all. The one joy of the universe is the presence of God, which is the indwelling power of Life. His presence is the continuous call of the Creator to the created, of the Father to His child.

The one joy, next to the love of God, is the love of our neighbor. If anyone were to say, "You love because it blesses you? I disagree. We are blessed because we love!" No one can experience the joy of loving his neighbor who does so from selfishness. **Love is unselfish. In reality, we love because we cannot help ourselves. There is no merit in love, neither is it selfish.**

Many confuse righteousness, fairness to all, with merit and think there is nothing righteous where there is no deserving reward. "If it makes you happy to love," they say, "where is your merit? It is only selfishness!" There is no merit, I reply, because the love born in us is our salvation from selfishness and is the very essence of righteousness. Because something is joyful, it does not mean that I do it for the joy of it. When the joy is in others receiving, the joy is pure.

A person would have to be hopelessly selfish, whom love did not make joyful. However, it is selfish to enjoy contentment while ignoring other's lack. A significant part of joy consists in the labor that others may share in it. This labor of love will be a great part of our heavenly gladness and contentment.

Difficult Forsakings

Some of the things a man may have to forsake like art, science, and nature in following Christ, are not because of themselves. These things are God's and have nothing to do with evil. Others that make up the conscious life or false life must be denied and will never be restored. However, there are good things that, for a time, may need to be forsaken to focus on life's actual necessities for himself and others. These are not bad things, but things that distract from the essentials.

We may have to forsake friends, not because they are evil, but for our focus on Christ. This focus is not to cease to love them, "... for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" We must be willing to forsake them, to be content to lose their approval, their friendship, their affection, where our Master says one thing, and they another. This willingness is to learn to love them in a far more profound, higher, and tenderer way than before.

I have not forgotten the word of the Lord about hating father and mother. I have a glimpse of its meaning but dare not attempt at explaining it now. It is all against the self, not against our fathers and mothers.

There is one final kind of forsaking that may be asked of some of us that we may find difficult. That is the forsaking of concepts about God and His Christ that we were taught as children. Those we held and could not help having when we first began to believe. Those we must now cast away because of doubts concerning their truthfulness, but that seem like parting with all our assurance of safety.

There are so-called doctrines that have been long accepted by good people. Doctrines which how anyone who loves God could hold, except by closing their spiritual eyes, I cannot understand. If a person cares more for his opinions than for Life, it is not worth another's time to persuade him to change his mind. They would just replace it with other opinions concerning things that belong to matters in which there are no opinions. By standing with a school of thought they suppose is RIGHT, they strengthen themselves with the worst of unbelief - opinion calling itself faith- unbelief calling itself true religion, Love.

How can those of us who seek the will of God and to whom knowing God is of extreme importance come close to him and know His will if our concepts of Him are false? We must give up our former assurance of salvation and give up such ideas of God that are unworthy of Him. We must not follow any doctrine, be it as accurate as any man can state it, but follow the Living Truth, Jesus Himself.

Good souls, many will one day be horrified at the things they now believe of God! If they have not thought about doctrines much but given themselves instead to obedience, they will not experience harm. But we can make little progress while holding unworthy thoughts as true. If, however, we do dwell on unworthy doctrines and find no issues with them. We are far indeed from anything we can call an actual knowledge of God.

Some find them a terrible obstruction, but yet imagine and fear they are true. These need to forsake their false concepts and follow Jesus. Not as others present him, but as He presents Himself. There are "traditions of men," both before and after Christ, that make the Gospel of no effect, and we must examine how we have learned Christ.

CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

Self-Denial

Christ is the way out, and the way in; the way from slavery, conscious or unconscious, into liberty; the way from the unhomeliness of things to the home we desire but do not know;

We must not merely do as he did; we must see things as he saw them, regard them as he regarded them; we must take the will of God as the very life of our being; we must neither try to get our own way, nor trouble ourselves as to what may be thought or said of us. The world must be to us as nothing.

The first thing in all progress is to leave something behind; to follow him is to leave one's self behind. 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself.'

Deny, not Control

True victory over self is the victory of God in the man, not of the man alone. It is not subjugation that is enough, but subjugation by God. In whatever man does without God, he must fail miserably—or succeed more miserably.

(Purpose of Self) Verily it is not to thwart or tease the poor self Jesus tells us. That was not the purpose for which God gave it to us. He tells us we must leave it altogether—yield it, deny it, refuse it, lose it: thus only shall we save it, thus only have a share in our own being. The self is given to us that we may sacrifice it; it is ours that we like Christ may have somewhat to offer—not that we should torment it, but that we should deny it; not that we should cross it, but that we should abandon it utterly: then it can no more be vexed.

Yielding as Denial

When he would take it from us; but to yield it heartily, without a struggle or regret, is not merely to deny the Self a thing it would like, but to deny the Self itself, to refuse and abandon it.

It has learned to receive with thankfulness, to demand nothing; to turn no more upon its own centre, or any more think to minister to its own good. God's eternal denial of himself, revealed in him who for our sakes in the flesh took up his cross daily, will have been developed in the man; his eternal rejoicing will be in God—and in his fellows,

When young we must not mind what the world calls failure; as we grow old, we must not be vexed that we cannot remember, must not regret that we cannot do, must not be miserable because we grow weak or ill: we must not mind anything. We have to do with God who can, not with ourselves where we cannot; we have to do with the Will, with the Eternal Life of the Father of our spirits, and not with the being which we could not make, and which is his care. He is our care; we are his; our care is to will his will; his care, to give us all things. This is to deny ourselves.

The Father's Yoke

To believe in him is to do as he does, to follow him where he goes. We must believe in him practically—altogether practically, as he believed in his Father; not as one concerning whom we have to hold something, but as one whom we have to follow out of the body of this death into life eternal.

It is not to follow him to take him in any way theoretically, to hold this or that theory about why he died, or wherein lay his atonement: such things can be revealed only to those who follow him in his active being and the principle of his life—who do as he did, live as he lived. There is no other following. He is all for the Father; we must be all for the Father too, else are we not following him. To follow him is to be learning of him, to think his thoughts, to use his judgments, to see things as he saw them, to feel things as he felt them, to be hearted, souled, minded, as he was—that so also we may be of the same mind with his Father. This it is to deny self and go after him; nothing less, even if it be working miracles and casting out devils, is to be his disciple.

Jesus' Yoke

The will of the Father is the yoke he would have us take, and bear also with him. It is of this yoke that he says, It is easy, of this burden, It is light.

Christ sought not his own, sought not anything but the will of his Father: we have to grow diamond-clear, true as the white light of the morning. Hopeless task!—were it not that he offers to come himself, and dwell in us.

But we must note that, although the idea of the denial of self is an entire and absolute one, yet the thing has to be done daily: we must keep on denying. It is a deeper and harder thing than any sole effort of most herculean will may finally effect. For indeed the will itself is not pure, is not free, until the Self is absolutely denied. It takes long for the water of life that flows from the well within us, to permeate every outlying portion of our spiritual frame, subduing everything to itself, making it all of the one kind, until at last, reaching the outermost folds of our personality,

Joy

(Independent Self) The careless soul receives the Father's gifts as if it were a way things had of dropping into his hand. He thus grants himself a slave, dependent on chance and his own blundering endeavour—yet is he ever complaining, as if some one were accountable for the checks which meet him at every turn. For the good that comes to him, he gives no thanks—who is there to thank? at the disappointments that befall him he grumbles—there must be some one to blame! He does not think to

what Power it could be of any consequence, nay, what power would not be worse than squandered, to sustain him after his own fashion, in his paltry, low-aimed existence!

How could a God pour out his being to uphold the merest waste of his creatures? No world could ever be built or sustained on such an idea. It is the children who shall inherit the earth; such as will not be children, cannot possess.

Assuredly we are not to love God for the sake of what he can give us; nay, it is impossible to love him save because he is our God, and altogether good and beautiful;

The heaven of Christ is a loving of all, a forgetting of self, a dwelling of each in all, and all in each. . . . His presence is the unintermittent call and response of the creative to the created, of the father to the child.

Love is unselfishness. In the main we love because we cannot help it. There is no merit in it: how should there be in any love?—but neither is it selfish.

Difficult Forsakings

So will it be in the forsaking of friends. To forsake them for Christ, is not to forsake them as evil. It is not to cease to love them, 'for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' it is—not to allow their love to cast even a shadow between us and our Master; to be content to lose their approval, their intercourse, even their affection, where the Master says one thing and they another. It is to learn to love them in a far higher, deeper, tenderer, truer way than before—a way which keeps all that was genuine in the former way, and loses all that was false. We shall love their selves, and disregard our own.

I do not forget the word of the Lord about hating father and mother: I have a glimpse of the meaning of it, but dare not attempt explaining it now. It is all against the self—not against the father and mother.

There are so-called doctrines long accepted of good people, which how any man can love God and hold, except indeed by fast closing of the spiritual eyes, I find it hard to understand.

Good souls many will one day be horrified at the things they now believe of God. If they have not thought about them, but given themselves to obedience, they may not have done them much harm as yet; but they can make little progress in the knowledge of God, while, if but passively, holding evil things true of him. If, on the other hand, they do think about them, and find in them no obstruction, they must indeed be far from anything to be called a true knowledge of God.