

Are You Hoping For A Breakthrough? part 1

What does it mean to give up your life?

Matthew 16: 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Every time I read this I am challenged by it. Are you? What do you think about when you read this? Does it encourage you or discourage you? Or perhaps does it leave you puzzled? After all, how does one give up his life? The NASB reads "but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." How do you lose your life?

This verse has not only challenged me but for many years I was puzzled by it. The idea of losing my life flat out scared me first of all, but then again I didn't completely understand it either. What does it mean? Does it mean to quit your job and join some monastery where you're cloistered for the rest of your life?

In any event, the idea never appealed to me so I simply skimmed the text without really considering it much. In other words, I kept reading to find more comforting words and pretty much ignored verses 24 and 25. That is how I used to live and still called myself a Christian. Read it again: "If any of you wants to be my follower, ..."

Am I a follower or not?

If I decide to be a follower of His, what must I do in order to lose my life?

I think perhaps John the Baptist shared some insight to this when he said:

John 3: 30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

I shouldn't have to state that this should be the main focus of the mature believer. We should always strive to think less and less of ourselves and more and more of Him. I think this could at least be the beginning of what "dying to self" is all about. This is when you forsake all that is precious to you, your ways, habits, desires, attitudes, dreams, and your ideas. These start to take a backseat, little by little, as we draw closer and closer to Him. It's less about me and more about Him.

As we continue to read through His Word we get more and more excited about His ways, His ideas, His attitudes, His habits, His dreams, and desires. If we allow God to work in us in this way over a period of time, persistently seeking Him, it's only a matter of time before what was important to us loses its value and we place a greater value on these things that are important to God.

This is the process of becoming one with Him and this is what Jesus modeled.

In this way, God transforms us more and more into His likeness and we become a sort of "Christ in the flesh" for those in our lives.

John 14: 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and

the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

And also in Colossians...

Colossians 1: 15a Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

We all know people and have loved ones who need God. They, like us, need His unconditional love, His gentleness, His kindness, His mercy, and His patience. What greater purpose or calling could we have than to become more like God so that those in our lives, who are wallowing in darkness, could get to know the living Christ through us? Isn't this a beautiful and glorious plan? And isn't this a great ministry in and of itself, to lead those closest to you to Christ?

Do you want more?

But some of us, including myself (at least on some days), want more. Maybe it's more responsibility or a greater following to reach more people. As if to say "If only I had greater audiences and be like those great preachers" or "If only I could start a soup kitchen or orphan house." Maybe you're hoping to start a full-time ministry. You may have envisioned your "dream ministry", you know, the answer to the question: "If God gave you unlimited resources and your choice of how to serve Him, what would that look like?"

However you answer that question, that is what I'm referring to. I shouldn't have to say that comparing yourself to others in ministry is never a good thing to do, but its human nature and whatever ministry works well for someone else, may not be suited for you. Only God knows how you can best be utilized and where you'll thrive. Some dreams die hard and that takes

us back to dying to self.

Are you faithful in the little things?

While many ministry dreams may be noble or God-given desires, we must know and understand God's ways, principles, and processes of growth and responsibility.

Luke 16: 10 "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"

Also:

Luke 12: 47 "And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn't prepared and doesn't carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. 48 But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required."

Throughout all of Scripture God has shown time and time again that if we are faithful and obedient with the "little things", He will reward us with greater things. He works the same today. Therefore we cannot afford to be distracted by what the future may hold in some ideal, fantasy world. We must live in the here and now, where every one of us is called to an immediate, local ministry to serve those that God entrusted to our care.

Be faithful in your immediate ministry...

You may know them as your wife, husband, son, daughter,

mother, father, friend, co-worker, the neighbor across the street, or the lady at the checkout counter that God put in your life to test your patience. Believe me when I say that only when you are faithful and are found trustworthy with your immediate ministry and after a season or more of demonstrating your perseverance and patience with where you're at now, will God give you something greater, which comes with greater responsibility.

So please be careful when you ask for a greater ministry, let me advise you to come first before God and say "Only when I'm ready, Lord, if it pleases you, I'd like to serve you in a greater way, but only in your time". Just be careful what you wish for. There are many Christian leaders over the ages that took on more responsibility before they were ready and many of them faced unnecessary failure and serve as bad examples.

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