

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,  
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,  
To GROW as followers of Jesus,  
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.  
- CG Mission Statement

## Icebreaker

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Who is your favorite animated character and why?

## Worship: Galatians 2:20

*(Read the poem or a Scripture passage to meditate on)*

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Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by attentively reading Galatians 2:20 aloud several times. Enter into a time of worship through prayer by using a word or a phrase from the passage.

## Text for Discussion: Mark 8:34-37

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Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

## Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

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The idea of self-denial can turn our stomach in knots. Jesus says we cannot be His disciples without denying ourselves, so it must be good for us... But that doesn't make it any easier!

**The Confusion About Self-Denial:** It's quite easy to misinterpret this call to discipleship. Some see it as a demand to deny ourselves things, giving up whatever is precious to us. But that's merely self-control, which is a fruit of self-denial but not its essence. Others believe it means denying our needs – ignoring our feelings, personal pain, or even safety. (Difficulty is part of discipleship, right?) Self-denial is also thought of as battling against our God-created personality – guarding ourselves against inappropriate self-esteem, self-indulgence or even self-care. Is any of this right?

**The Meaning of Self-Denial:** The denial of a person means disconnecting, severing our ties from them. Self-denial is therefore surrendering the ultimate allegiance of our hearts (from ourselves) to God. This doesn't mean we cease being ourselves. God has made each of us gloriously different. And God doesn't make mistakes. Christ's desire is that we would be our God-created selves, free from sin, under His loving rule. The One we were always meant to serve and love is finally the Master we serve and love.

Too often, when we talk about discipleship, we overemphasize the cost. We need to recognize and delight in the surpassing worth of following Christ, regardless of the cost. For when we focus on the cost – all we've given up to follow Him – it makes us the hero of the story. But as we begin to comprehend the life and joy offered in Jesus, we'll see it as an invitation to freedom. The daily act of self-denial becomes training for our hearts to wholly love the only One who always has (and always will) love us wholly.

**The Practice of Self-Denial.** This will look different for each of us, but we need to accept that every Christian will have to confront and exercise self-denial in some form. We all have a variety of things that stand in the way of us putting Jesus first in our lives. Self-denial will include abstaining from things we know to be sinful. But that doesn't mean we have to turn away from every good desire. Jesus is telling us to die to anything that causes us to live for ourselves instead of Him.

Marriage is an example of self-denial. Though they are deeply imperfect, they point to the true marriage of Christ and the church. It is therefore a signpost to the world that Jesus is worth loving and serving. Singleness is also an example of self-denial. As we give our lives for others, it is a billboard for the sufficiency and beauty of Christ.

Self-denial isn't about hating ourselves; it's about coming to know who we are in Christ. It's about the denial of self-definition. No longer do we get to define our worth or value. God does. Rather than asking ourselves, "Who am I," we instead turn to Jesus and ask, "Who do you say I am?"

## Guiding Question of the Week

*(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)*

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**How does Jesus answer life's questions, "Who am I?" and "What is the most important thing about me?" in these verses?**

## Questions for Discussion

*(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)*

- What comes to your mind when you think of Jesus' command to self-denial and taking up your cross to follow Him?
  - Discuss common confusions around self-denial and taking up your cross.
- We are meant to deny anything that causes us to live for ourselves instead of Jesus. How does this apply to our desires? dreams? personality?
  - How does biblical self-denial make you free to be the person you were intended to be?
- What do we learn about self-denial from the denial of Jesus by Peter?
  - What do we learn about self-denial from a marathon runner in training?
  - What do we learn about self-denial from marriage?
  - What do we learn about self-denial from singleness?
- How does Jesus answer life's questions, "Who am I?" and "What is the most important thing about me?" in these verses?
  - What does Jesus say to you when you ask him to define your worth?
  - In what ways do you want to lose yourself for the sake of Jesus and the gospel?
- What is something you most want to remember from this passage?
  - What life application do you want to make?

## Prayer

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Write down the names of yet-to-believe friends on 3x5 cards, one name per card. Write a brief description of how to pray for the needs of each person. Hand out the cards and pray in groups of 2 or 3 over the names. Collect them at the end of the meeting so that they can be redistributed to pray again at the next meeting.

## Experiment of the Month

*(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)*

### Spiritual Formation Experience:

For the next few weeks in your personal worship time, use an online concordance to do a Bible search on the things God's people are called to be thankful for. Make a list of your discoveries, journal your reflections and life applications. Share this study with your family or community group at Thanksgiving.

### Missional Experiment:

Pray for non-believers over the holiday season. Write some of your specific prayers in a journal with the hope that one day you might share the prayer journal with the person you have been praying for.