

Give it up.

Great Commandment, part 3
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We live in a culture where materialism thrives and dominates. Not only is there a fostered desire to acquire material things, but we are also being encouraged through the media to do so. And human nature adds the elements of envy and greed that take over to the point of people going into debt to satisfy their wants. In such an environment, denying yourself falls way down on most people's list of things to do. Whether we are active participants in this frenzy or not, everyone is affected by it. Actions have consequences no matter where they originate, and someone

else can assuredly be affected by another's actions. But Jesus calls Christians to a new dynamic of living. Jesus, speaking to his disciples on what must have been an awe-inspiring day for them. He had just feed over 5000 people with two small fish and five barley loaves. In the midst of their joy and enthusiasm, Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. We later learn that the disciples took only the death part to heart as they were seemingly surprised when He rose from the grave. And Jesus continued with a difficult to hear teaching.

"And He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23).

It must have been complete shock to those who thought the Messiah would bring about victory over enemies and make life better all around. But instead, Jesus informed them that they would have to deny themselves—meaning give up everything you possess, including your thoughts, plans, jobs, activities, and even family. Give up your desires. Give up your controls. Give up your agendas. Jesus was telling them to die to self... so that He may live *through* them.

Denying yourself in this context means your whole self, just as the Greatest Commandment directs: your heart, soul, strength, and mind. But have you ever thought about what these parts of our existence are? The Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind are our emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual elements of personhood. Together, these constitute the whole self. In this passage in Luke, as well as the Greatest Commandment, calls us to give our ALL to Him, not only what we want to give up. They undoubtedly call for giving ALL of everything with love.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:36-38 NKJV).

Love God (pursue passionately) using ALL. Completely. Exhaustively. The entirety of who you are is to be intentionally denied so you can accomplish this. Die to self by resolutely surrendering your heart, soul, strength, and mind to Him. Total abandonment and total surrender.

On its face denying yourself seems like a risky proposition. The disciples likely thought so as well. This wasn't the first time they had wondered about their wellbeing. Much earlier they were concerned about how they were going to eat, what to wear, what to say, and what to say to people. Jesus reminded them

that God clothes the lilies of the field and could certainly take care of them; but the key to their success was having the right priorities and trusting God for the rest.

“Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:31-34).

Obedience to God’s word is the purest form of worship. His word is the immutable truth. It comes from His Spirit and returns to Him through our spirit. Not only reading God’s truth back to Him but demonstrating His truth through our actions. This requires love as the fuel driving ALL of our heart, soul, strength, and mind—in all things at all times. Doing so is the purest form of worship.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24 NKJV).

Keeping the Greatest Commandment is essential because it fulfills our purpose and is, at its very root, worship—and Christians are to worship God. The psalmist directs us to:

Praise the Lord!
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord!
(Psalms 150:1-6 NKJV)

The psalmist sounds like He’s all in, right? This does not necessarily mean to attend a gathering for a “worship service,” though that is certainly a part of what we are called to do. Rather, the worship the Great Commandment calls Christians to is a lifestyle that honors God. A lifestyle of worship. It involves ALL of oneself seeking ALL of Him, with ALL of our resources.

Are you living in a lifestyle of praise? A lifestyle of worship? A lifestyle of total surrender? Can you totally deny yourself, die to self, and follow Jesus daily?

It is only when we set ourselves aside and imitate Jesus that we can passionately pursue, to love God with our ALL. Get out of the way and instead follow *The Way* (John 14:6). Move over and let Jesus take control. Surrender ALL your heart full of emotions, your spiritual consciousness of soul, your physical strength and prowess, and your intellectual thoughts and desires to the Sovereign God, the Creator of the universe!

Rise to the holy height of the Great Commandment O Christian! Let the love of Jesus take over and live through you. God’s richest blessings await!