

# The Grace Of Self Denial

*“If anyone would come after me,  
he must deny himself and take up his cross  
and follow me.”*

*Matthew 16:24 (NIV)*

When we look at humanity we can easily see that many people have a spirit of self protection that seems to border on the area of personal greed. Little children are a good example of how young this tendency can emerge in our behaviour.

When Billy wants a toy his younger sister is happily playing with, he will try to grab it from her. If she resists he may take what is in his hand and hit her on the head to make her drop the desired toy. He is blissfully unaware of her cries of pain as he then starts to enjoy the toy she dropped to clutch her aching head.

Billy will be playing merrily with something when a sibling enters the room and picks up a toy that belongs to him. Although he was not playing with the toy, his sense of territory rises to the surface and he insists his little sister leave the toy alone. The fact he does not want to play with it is irrelevant.

As adults, such a way of living can also be seen. Sometimes a man who was happily married sees another man's wife, that he believes he suddenly needs for his ultimate happiness. The pursuit of personal happiness can easily leave other people hurt and discarded as the individual promotes his/her own happiness at any cost to others.

The world has a saying, “I have a right to be happy.” C. S. Lewis wrote a brilliant essay entitled, “We have no ‘right to happiness’”. I encourage my readers to find it on the net or in a book and study it to clarify your own thinking on this matter.

Our purpose in this life, according to our Creator, is to deny ourselves. We are to put our own happiness on hold and follow the One Who denied what was rightfully His in order to secure the eternal joy of His people (Philippians 2:6-11).

By denying ourselves, we are to understand that it is still legitimate to pursue “health

and happiness” as long as we stay within the teaching of Scripture. The time when life becomes difficult is when circumstances take over and reduce us to suffering, poverty, poor health, or some other significant loss. Then we must submit to the obvious will of God and accept the situation that brings tears with it.

When providence requires us to deny ourselves, we may be assured that the God Who called us to suffer (1 Thessalonians 3:3) will, with the sorrow, bring the grace to deny ourselves and continue to pursue our calling.

The child of God may be called to walk a “road less travelled”, but you will not walk alone. Beside you will be the God in whom you trust. His gentle presence will guide you all the way through that difficult path to His home and yours (Mark 8:35).

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