

Sacred 4-Letter Words: Self

Study Guide for Small Group Discussion and Personal Application
Lynn Haven UMC – January 17, 2021 – Pastor Craig Carter

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“Four-letter words” are commonly understood to be profane curses that are not uttered in polite company (though they have grown more commonplace in recent years). A recent book by Charles Lake and Matt Ayars titled *Holy Is a Four-Letter Word* identifies a number of a different category of four-letter words that enable us to live a holy life in an unholy world. Today we consider the word **self** – self is an obstacle for us, something that we repeatedly stumble over, and keeps us from living a holy lifestyle.

Pride and selfishness are at the root of all sin. We live in a world dominated by prideful ambition, fits of anger and impatience, jealousy, contention and it’s all because of human self-centeredness. We must find a way to overcome the sin of self-centeredness.

Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn’t pleased at being ignored. - Romans 8:5-8 MSG

This is how we can conquer the enemy of self:

And [Jesus] said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” - Luke 9:23 ESV

1) DENIAL of Self: “Let him deny himself...”

“To deny oneself is to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness.” - C.E.B. Cranfield

Self-denial involves dethroning ourselves and enthroning God as the ruler of our lives. It is detachment from self-interest and attachment to God and His will. But self-denial is not self-abasement or self-hatred! It is allowing God to be the controlling force in our lives and saying as Jesus did, “Not my will, but yours be done”. When we take that approach, we’ll have a healthy view of self and proper self-respect and self-love because we recognize we are God’s beloved children.

2) DEATH of Self: “Take up his cross daily”

We sometimes trivialize Jesus’ teaching by suggesting our arthritic knee or annoying mother-in-law is the cross we must bear. But in the ancient world, anyone carrying a cross was on a one-way journey to death. So someone who lives by this command sees his or her life as being over.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. - Galatians 2:20 ESV

I die every day! - 1 Corinthians 15:31 CEV

So cross-bearing is a daily willingness to give ourselves over to Christ, His will and His ways.

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship*

3) DEVOTION of Self: “Follow me”

[The disciples] left everything and followed Jesus, becoming His disciples, believing and trusting in Him and following His example. - Luke 5:11 AMP

Following Jesus means walking on the same path. It means complete obedience and total abandonment to the call of Christ on our lives. Remember the game “Follow the Leader” and how carefully one needed to mimic the behavior of the leader? That is what we are called to do in following Jesus.

Conclusion

⇒ What does cross-bearing and death-to-self look like, practically speaking, in your own life? How would you need to live differently to follow after Jesus whole-heartedly?

⇒ Is there one area of your life where you sense you might be a little too preoccupied with yourself – your image, your success, or even your woundedness?

⇒ What’s ONE THING that keeps tripping you up and prevents you from reaching the goals you’ve set as a Christian?

⇒ What’s ONE act of self-denial you can take, or ONE thing you can sacrifice to the Lord, or ONE way you can more fully devote yourself to Christ and follow Jesus?