

21 Days to Die

What it means to take up your cross and follow Jesus



and live a resurrected life in Christ

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Jesus taught that His greatest command for His followers is to walk in His love. Yet it seems the greatest *need* in the body of Christ today is for its members to walk in love. At times, it seems we have barely scratched the surface in our understanding of this important subject and have not placed the value on this teaching it deserves in our churches. Why?

I believe it's because we have often misunderstood the love of God. God's love is a true and sincere love. His love is not the same as how man defines love. His love is more than an emotional thing, and many Christians have been stuck in a cycle of emotional pain which has kept them from both receiving and giving the love of God. You must receive His love before you can have any hope of sincerely loving others (1 John 4:19).

To walk in godly love requires that you live a new life in Christ—a resurrected life! Resurrection, of course, comes after death. This is why Jesus said that we need to take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). If we don't follow Him all the way through to the death that the cross represents then not only will we not experience the joy of resurrected living, but we remain *wounded* instead of dead and the cycle of emotional pain, which interferes with you keeping Jesus' greatest command, continues. Really, your key to freedom and victory in life is connected to doing as Jesus said, taking up your cross daily and following Him. It sounds like a painful thing and something that you would want to avoid, but in reality, it is a liberating thing that sets you free from pain and suffering, and free to love as our Lord commands!

The Bible tells us that we are changed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). This is a *process* and not something that happens instantly. It requires you to take the time to study and meditate on the Word of God in order to change your thinking to be like His. Because this process of renewing your mind takes time and effort, this book has been prepared with the idea of taking 21 days to meditate on the process of dying to yourself, which will allow you to move on to a new resurrected life in Christ. Of course, the process will not be over in 21 days, this is a lifelong process. But my hope is that this booklet will give you a boost in your journey to live a resurrected life in Christ. Because this is such an important subject, I encourage you to be diligent to study and meditate on each thought for the day, throughout the day, in order to change your habits of thinking to be more like Christ's. In so doing you will be keeping the greatest command of our Lord Jesus and will experience freedom from the bondage of emotional pain as well.

May God guide you in your journey!

Rose Murdock

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Introduction

Surrendering the Soul

Jesus said if anyone wishes to come after Him, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). He went on to say that whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake, will save it (Luke 9:24). The "life" Jesus is speaking of here is not your physical body, and its not your spirit either. It's your soul.

To understand this, we must realize that a human being is made up of three parts – spirit, soul, and body. When Jesus talked about denying ourselves and dying on our cross to follow Him, He wasn't talking about physically killing our bodies, and He wasn't talking about sacrificing our spirit, for that would mean we would give ourselves over to spiritual death – which would make His work on the cross pointless. He was talking about our soul. We must deny living our lives by following our soul, and follow Him instead. So, what is the soul?

Your body, of course, is your physical body which everyone sees, and which you use to go about your daily business. This is your connection here to planet earth and is, in its current form, temporary – subject to death.

Your spirit is the part of you that contacts the spiritual realm, where God is. This is the part of you that communicates with God in the eternal realm, and the part of you that is born again when you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your living spirit contains eternal life and through it you obtain truth from the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Truth.

Your soul contains your mind – the part of you that thinks, reasons, stores information and memories. It contains both your conscious and subconscious mind. Your soul also contains your emotions, as well as your will. Your will is where you make decisions, and the will gathers its information from both the mind and emotions. Your life experiences, and how you perceived and judged those experiences, are stored within your soul, and contribute to your decision-making processes. Your subconscious mind forms your personality and your beliefs. Your habits, actions, and reactions generally come from your soul, and your subconscious mind. Through your soul you interact with people on earth.

Your soul was not made to lead; however, it was meant to yield to your spirit, and therefore to God who communicates with you through your spirit.

Why is this important?

When Adam and Eve were created, their spirits were alive with the life and breath of God. They were in communication with God, and they processed everything spirit, soul, and body, in the manner they were created. So, the decisions they made, and the actions they took, were in sync with God, and therefore truth. They had life, they had beauty, they had provision, they had purpose, and they had authority in the earth to fulfill their purpose. Life was good.

Until they listened to words from another source—lies. When they chose to listen to satan and submit to his lies, which is what they were, they lost their spiritual life. Their souls, never intended to be the source of “truth,” began to make decisions based on the void in their hearts, the appetites of their flesh, the errors of the soul, and more lies of the enemy, which accumulated quickly.

The fallen soul is controlled by the nature inherited from satan, which is pride, rebellion, and opposition toward God. The human race was now in the middle of satan’s rebellion against God, for this fallen nature has been passed down to all mankind.

But God had a Plan

However, God had a plan to buy back the human race from the clutches of satan. Jesus came and, though God, He was also man, and He lived as one of us, yet without sin which qualified Him to become the sacrifice for the sin of all mankind, so whoever believes in Him can be born-again. Our spirits come alive with the breath and life of God when we believe in Jesus Christ and make Him Lord of our lives.

Our soul, however, is another story. Our soul—the old nature which consciously or subconsciously may still yield to the sinful nature of the flesh—needs to go through the crucifixion process. Its leadership needs to be denied, its cross taken up, and follow Jesus.

One who is born into the family of God is one who does the will of the Father (Matthew 12:46-50), which is to believe in Jesus (John 6:29). But the will of the Father is not just to believe in His Son, but to do as Jesus did— which was to submit His will to the Father. We are to believe in Jesus, and then do the same as He did—submit our will to the Father (Luke 22:42, Luke 9:23).

When your soul is so filled with belief in God—when the old strongholds of pride, self, and that which opposes Him are replaced with submission to Him and His will in obedience to His Word—then you have true faith in God. Faith that will endure through whatever trials come your way.

As the old root systems of your soul are removed, and you feed on the Word of God, it has room to grow so it can take deep root in your heart, and fill every place of your heart and soul. Full commitment, full surrender. Full death to the old self. This is what it means to take up our cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Then, evidence of your faith—fruit—will be seen in your life.

So, as you read this booklet, keep in mind that it’s the soul that needs to go to the cross, in full surrender to God and His Spirit.

1. Facing the Fear of Loss

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Job 13:15 NASB

I was struggling. I was trying to hold it all together, yet I thought I was trusting God to bring me through. It was difficult. Finally, the Lord got my attention. He gave me this Scripture from Job and asked me a question. “Would you follow the path I have for you if you knew you’d have to lose something along the way?” That went against my “faith” thinking. God doesn’t want me to lose anything, He wants me to gain. He wants to bring blessing. I knew that Job was blessed in the end – *doubly* blessed. I had always thought about that and not about what he went through and what he had lost.

It was a simple question. “Would I be *willing*?” Would I still follow Him even if it meant that I had to lose something? I wasn’t sure what I would have to lose and many thoughts went through my mind – mainly material things. I wasn’t even sure I would have to lose anything. The question was if I was *willing*. Was I just a fair-weathered friend to God? Did I only want to stick around and hang out with Him when He was throwing roses in front of my feet, or was I willing to follow Him and His ways even if it was difficult? I had never allowed myself to follow this line of questioning because I considered it to be unbelief. The question was still on the table. God wasn’t going any further with me until I answered the question. He wasn’t asking me to do anything just yet, but answer a question. I knew I had to be honest. Again, “Would you follow that path I have for you even if you knew you’d have to lose something along the way?” He wasn’t asking me for a theological debate. He wasn’t asking me anything but this one question. Finally, I answered, “Yes, Lord I will.”

Whew, I said it. Do you know what I felt? Instant relief. Instant pressure relief. Now it didn’t matter. I wasn’t afraid to lose anything. I wasn’t afraid to “fail.” Somehow, as odd as it may seem, by admitting I was willing to suffer loss if the path to where God was taking me led me through it, I experienced such a level of freedom my whole life changed. I wasn’t afraid. I didn’t have to hold it all together. I trusted God in a whole new way. Really, this is no different from what happens when you give something. When you give you suffer a loss. If you have \$50 in your wallet and you give \$30 away then you are left with \$20 right? You have suffered a loss. That’s what it means to give. You give it – you don’t have it any more.

That’s what God was asking me – to give. I knew He wasn’t asking me to suffer endlessly or needlessly. He just wanted to know if I was willing to go through some inconvenience for Him. Why did I hesitate? What did I think walking by faith was anyway? Hadn’t the apostles, and heroes of faith in the Bible, gone through tough times also? Look at all He’s given to me. God asked me this question not because He didn’t know what I would say, but because He wanted me to see where I was at, and if I would consciously become willing to trust Him completely and give Him my life like He did for me.

1. Do you understand that God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for your sin, and that God raised Him from the dead so, through faith in Him, you may receive eternal life and forgiveness of sin? The call to take up your cross and follow Jesus is for those who have first received Him as Lord and Savior. Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, you can do so now by calling out to Him. (See John 3:3-18; Romans 10:8-10, 13; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 1:13-23, 1 John 1:1-10).

2. You receive God's great gift of salvation by grace and through faith (Ephesians 2:8). He becomes your Father as you are born again into His great family. This salvation includes great hope – eternal life as well as the eventual resurrection of your body into a glorified body in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:52-58). However, while here on earth, it's not just your faith, but your faithfulness that pleases God and will bring you through life's difficulties. Do you desire to please God through both your faith in Him and your faithfulness to Him?

3. The trials of life that try your faith, are trying your faithfulness to God as well. Once tried, your faith, which God sees as more precious than gold, when tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7). Do you understand that it is important to "consider it all joy" when you "encounter various trials," (James 1:2), knowing that the testing of your faith is working for your good, to produce endurance, and a strengthening of your faithfulness?

4. Psalm 37:3 tells us to, "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate (or feed on His) faithfulness." You can feed on the faithfulness of God! It will nourish your own. Take a few moments to feed on the love of God for you; the sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross for your sin to give you new life; and the faithfulness of God which never ends.

Know that God causes you to triumph in Him (2 Corinthians 2:14). Although tough times will arise, you can and will come through by faith. However, if you are afraid of loss, you may clutch on to things too tightly, losing the very things you're fighting to keep.

"I am willing to follow Your path and not be afraid to lose something."

2. Shattering Fragile Dedication

Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? *Job 2:10 NASB*

We know God is good and He has no evil to give us, right? (James 1:17). Of course, that's not to say the Christian life is free from difficulties, or that our faith is not put to the test. Job was answering his wife who was telling him to curse God and die. She couldn't believe that Job was staying faithful to God after all the losses he suffered. However, Job knew his answer was not found in rejecting God. If you were to lose contact with someone you know very well and love dearly, would you believe accusations against them like, "They don't care about you anymore. They've abandoned you?" Probably not. Job knew God better than that. He may not have understood everything, but he was determined to stay true to Him.

There's an aspect of Job's character we need to see—his willingness to stick with God no matter what. That says a lot for Job's faithfulness to God. If God were to lead you down a bumpy road would you throw in the towel and say, "That's it God I'm not serving you anymore unless You only bring me down paved highways!" I hope not! I would hope your dedication to Him is less fragile than that. He doesn't give up on you that easily. How many times do we fall short of His commands and yet He sticks with us? (Hebrews 13:5). Yet if things get a little rough, we rebuke the devil when our situation may very well be a mess we've gotten ourselves into.

Maybe God is taking you on a shortcut to get you to the place He wants you to be. Usually the shortcuts are bumpy because of something in your life that needs to be smoothed out. Or He may be leading you the long way around because there is something of eternal benefit that needs to be worked out in you. Remember Jesus said the narrow way to life is found by few (Matthew 7:14).

Like Job, who may have had a desire to perfect his children himself, the road may be bumpy because you have some things you need to get straightened out as well. We need to cut God some slack. After all, He is God and who are we to question Him? He really is deserving of our love and respect. There is something about the fear of the Lord that all of His people need to discover. Now of course you need to know Him so the devil can't pull one over on you and get you to receive an evil thing from him thinking it's from God when it isn't. You don't want to accept something from the devil thinking it's from God. In order to avoid that, you need to have a good understanding of the Word of God and you need to know how to hear from His Spirit. In other words, you need to get to know God and become intimate with Him. When you do, you'll better understand how deserving He is of your faithful dedication.

1. Is there something going on in your life right now that you are not happy with? Describe it here.

2. What exactly are your feelings about it? (Anger, fear, boredom, frustration, guilt, confusion, impatience etc.)

3. If God asked you to accept this path, to not complain about it, in spite of your feelings, would you? What does that mean you'd have to do? (or not do?)

4. Are you willing to remain loyal to God and still follow His Kingdom principles even if you don't yet understand what's going on around you? What would nurture this kind of loyal heart in you? Would it help if you knew God's love for you better? How can you know His love better? Search the Scriptures that speak of His love toward you.

Know that God wants you to trust Him even if you don't understand. Yet this doesn't mean you accept everything that arises on your path as being from Him. You have the responsibility of learning to recognize when the enemy is trying to bring opposition, and to overcome him through the armor God has given you. But staying faithful to God even through those difficult times He has allowed into your life, is an act of faith, faithfulness, loyalty, thanksgiving, and worship toward Him.

**"I will lay aside my own feelings
and remain loyal to Your guidance without doubting You."**

3. Temporary Loss-Fruitful Gain

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. *John 12:24 NASB*

Unless a seed dies in the ground, it remains buried alone. Jesus went to the cross, died and was buried for us. But He was raised by the Father and has born much fruit – all of those who believe in Him. Jesus went on to say if anyone serves Him, he must follow Him, and where He is, there His servant will be also (John 12:26). We follow Him by going through a similar death and resurrection. However, there must be a death or else we will remain buried alone.

When you fight the dying process, you'll remain alone. You'll begin to feel like something is missing – lacking. However, as long as you are unwilling to go through the required death that leads to life, you won't open up your hard outer shell to receive the water of life that Jesus has provided. Jesus said that with the water He gives, you'll never thirst again (John 4:14). That's the only water that will quench your thirst and bring you to a resurrected life in Him. When you try to fill the void in your heart with something other than what He gives, you'll continue to thirst. You can trust Him to send the water onto the seed of your life that is planted in the ground. When that happens, your life will grow and blossom into something beautiful!

When you try to hang on to your own way too tightly you'll lose the very thing you're searching for. Don't try to save the seed. The seed was made to be planted and "die" in order to germinate and produce life. When you die to yourself, you'll reap a richer and fuller life in return. The things that you used to think you needed to make you happy, you realize don't make you as happy anymore. If you used to think that you had to have certain people or things in your life in order to feel complete and fulfilled, you'll realize that you don't need those people or those things to feel complete. When they're there they may be a blessing – an added bonus – but your fulfillment is found in Christ.

A telltale sign that you have not fully buried the seed of the soul in submission to Him is if you are still feeling the feelings of loneliness or lack. If the feelings are there then the old way is still trying to save itself. You haven't let it go. Don't keep those feelings of lack alive. Don't keep digging up the seed. That will only keep you in a place of pain. Don't be afraid to let go. It might look like a lonely place to go to the ground and die but there are things you need to go *through* in order to get to the resurrected life. God doesn't want you to be lonely, you were created for fellowship. However, He doesn't want you to suck the life out of everyone around you either. Nor does He want you to settle for a shallow, soul-led existence, when intimate fellowship with Him is awaiting! Put those feelings – the feelings of the old nature – to death and allow the Lord to do His work in you. Then you will have the kind of relationships – with Him and others – that will be fruitful and enjoyable – not fake, but sincerely joyful!

1. Jesus went to the cross and died. He was buried alone. His life was completely in the hands of His Father. Yet, at the right time, God raised Him from the dead. Do you understand that when you fully surrender your life to God – making yourself completely vulnerable to Him – that He does not forget you, and no matter what the difficulty is at the moment, resurrection is coming? Take a minute to reflect on that and thank God for not leaving you alone.

2. What is the biggest difficulty you are facing right now? Search the Scriptures for God’s mind and ask the Holy Spirit to give you understanding, and reveal the truth of His Word to you. Feed on those Scriptures until they absorb into your soul.

3. Are you trying to force a circumstance in your life to go a certain way? Can you only see one way out of your problem? Or can you see only one possible path for a situation in your life? Open your heart and soul to God and let Him know you are willing to hear His thoughts on your situation.

4. The most important relationship in your life is your relationship with the Lord. He has sent the Holy Spirit to bring you into fellowship with Him and the Father, and to teach you His ways, to lead you in all of your paths. Do you consider your relationship with Him your most important relationship? If not, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to come to that place.

Know that you are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10) and being in relationship with Him eradicates longings and loneliness in your heart. However, He does desire for you to have relationships with other people. He didn’t call you to be a loner but to be part of His body.

**“Lord, I make myself completely vulnerable to You.
I open my heart to fellowship with You and to hear Your heart.”**

4. Not Failure, But Death

Save Yourself, and come down from the cross! *Mark 15:30 NASB*

Jesus was ridiculed on the cross. Not only was He beaten but He was laughed at, spit on, and mocked. He looked like a failure. It looked like everything He said and all that He did meant nothing now because He was dying a horrible, humiliating death. It looked like He had no hope of success. However, His “failure” was only temporary. It was proven that it was not failure at all. It was necessary for Him to suffer all that He did in order for Him to carry all of our sin. It was all part of the plan.

Just like with Jesus, God has not called you to failure, but He has called you to death. At times it may look like you are a failure. It may look like you have lost all, and you have no hope, but if you die to yourself, you ride the higher wave of God’s glory. There is the wave of success which is man’s glory, but then there is the higher wave of God’s glory which comes as you die to yourself and live for Him. It’s when you do things His way instead of the dark and selfish way. It’s when you are railed and accused but you don’t argue back (1 Peter 2:23). You love your enemies and bless those that curse you (Luke 6:27-28). It’s when you’re not selfishly trying to promote yourself and your cause but are willing to prefer your brother above yourself (Romans 12:10). There is a difference between failure and death. Others may laugh at you and mock you because you don’t appear to be successful in what you’re doing, but when you respond in love then you ride the higher wave. You prefer the glory of God over the glory of man. You don’t fall for the praises of men. Your heart isn’t looking for worship from men, but you are looking to worship Almighty God. You will be sincere in your worship once you see His great love for you.

They told Jesus to *save Himself*. They didn’t realize that if He would have saved Himself then none of us could have been saved. He had a higher call. There is a call higher than saving yourself and looking out for only yourself. You’re not called to save yourself, but to lay down your life for your brethren (John 15:12-13, 1 John 3:16). The only way for each one of us to be saved is to go the way of the cross. To be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). To identify with Him and to follow Him to the other side of the cross and to the resurrected life we have available in Him. You don’t save yourself by coming down from the cross, you save yourself by dying to yourself and allowing yourself to be crucified in identification with Him. Dying to yourself means that you don’t need to defend yourself, vindicate yourself or promote yourself. How can you have the strength to live this way? Jesus did it by keeping his eye on the other side of the cross. He looked beyond the selfish and murderous people in front of Him and saw the joy and the glory on the other side (Hebrews 12:1-4). He didn’t have to prove Himself or defend Himself to these people. In the end the truth would come out and the love of God would shine. The same can happen for you!

1. Do you still suffer the effects of failure in your life? Have you considered that God can (and maybe already has) used those failures to bring necessary correction or humility to you? Look at your past failures and note any good that has come out of them.

2. When Jesus died, looking like a failure to the world, He was mocked and ridiculed. He could have “saved Himself.” He could have shown them who He was. But He chose to take the humiliating path to save them instead. Have you been tempted to compromise your way out of failure? To seek the acceptance of people over that which is right and true? Of course, God will forgive you if you repent of that, but additionally, you can ask Him to purge your soul of any trace of that which would cause you to do that again.

3. We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). It’s in your new nature in Christ. Yield to that nature and allow it to permeate your soul. Look to the hope of His coming and of being like Him (1 John 3:2-3). When you read to the Bible, keep that in mind, and see His Word as a reflection of who you are (2 Corinthians 3:18).

4. Prepare yourself for the next time someone mistreats you, lies about you, or curses you in some way. How will you respond as Jesus did? What will you do to keep from retaliating? Study the image of Jesus on the cross, not defending Himself or retaliating against His accusers until you see yourself doing the same.

God wants you to be fulfilled and complete in Him but not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to (Romans 12:3). You don’t save yourself by staying off the cross. You save yourself by humbly following Jesus and dying to those desires to curse or retaliate.

**“I will not look to defend or promote myself.
Instead, I will pray for those who mistreat me.”**

5. Pursuing His Plans

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. *Luke 9:23 NASB*

Since we must take up our cross daily then that shows that the old nature wants to resurrect itself. You'll need to remind yourself that you have died. You'll have to do this more than once, you'll do it every day. You'll present your body a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). When you are willing to remain in a place of death, (not dying but death), God sees to it that you remain in His life. You see the wave you're riding as the wave of death and He sees it as the wave of His glory.

To take up your cross daily, doesn't mean you have a heavy burden you're required to bear. What is the purpose of a cross? What do you do with it? You die on it. You're not supposed to be carrying the cross around you're supposed to die on it. There's a difference. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He said if anyone is tired to come to Him and find rest for your soul (Matthew 11:28-30). Your soul is the part of you that needs to die. It was not meant to be in charge. It will try, but we must follow Jesus' example and say, "Not my will but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

You're not to carry around the burdens of life yourself, that's not what bearing your cross means. It means you deny yourself. To deny yourself means that you're willing to live life God's way, from His perspective. It means you are no longer doing what you alone think is right but you have accepted Jesus' way as the right way. You're not looking to promote yourself but you're pursuing His interests. To do that you must spend time with Him and in His Word so you know Him, you know His way. Study the Word until it becomes saturated within your heart.

Notice that you take up your cross and follow Jesus, not people. Denying yourself doesn't mean that you let other people run your life. You have been given the rule over your own spirit (Proverbs 25:28). You have to be able to make decisions regarding your own life in order for you to be able to live as God says. You love God first then your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:29-31). You don't allow people to take you down a path that contradicts God's leading in your own heart. So don't think that dying to yourself means that you have no control over what happens to you and that you have to do everything for everyone else in your life. No, you have the responsibility to do the right thing with your life. You will need to do it in the Lord's strength, but you still need to do it.

God is the Master Planner. He can see so much more than you can. He sees how your life fits into the big plan. He sees how your life fits into the lives of those around you, and His plan for you is good (Jeremiah 29:11). You can trust Him. You can follow Jesus confidently who will lead you to the Father and will bring you into your place in the great design of life. It's a struggle and a burden when you try and live your life from your own perspective. By dying on your cross you will gain God's perspective for your life and will live the life you were designed for.

1. What has been your plans, your specific hopes and dreams? (I've always wanted to...)

2. Could there be a motive other than the will of God in pursuing these dreams? (A dream that began before you knew God; an ungodly motive that promotes self; a purely money-motivated dream; to prove something to someone else; to retaliate...)

3. Are you willing to adjust your daily schedule in order to spend time in prayer and study of the Word of God? What will that look like on a daily basis? What will you sacrifice to set aside this time?

4. Realizing that the "small" choices you make today will affect your future, what step can you take today to begin fulfilling what you think is God's plan for your life?

Know that very often the hopes and dreams you have are God-given. However, sometimes your dreams may be an idol in itself. You can become obsessed with obtaining these dreams, and you can pursue and seek after the idol of your dreams rather than God. Putting anything before God will bring death instead of life and keep you in a place of frustration instead of peace.

**"I will bring all of my plans, hopes, and dreams
in subjection to Your plans for me."**

6. Dead, Not Wounded

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. *Luke 9:24 NASB*

It's only painful if you fight it. You may think you're ready to lay down your life and then when that first nail goes in you change your mind then you're walking around, wounded, half crucified, dragging the cross around with you, and you're angry. You know that pain brings anger. (If you don't think so just pay attention the next time you stub your toe). When you walk around angry and hurt, you will hurt others. You'll be focused on yourself – your pain and your problems. You will need to go back to the Lord and ask Him to finish the job.

The Bible says that Jesus was able to endure the cross because of the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2-3). Knowing the joy on the other side will help you to endure the cross of today. The cross of today involves resisting sin. The Bible tells us to resist sin to the point of blood (Hebrews 12:4). We think we're only supposed to resist to the point of tears, but He said to resist to blood. Would you die before you'd sin? Would you cut off your hand before you'd sin? (Matthew 5:27-30). I hope you understand I don't mean you should maim yourself or crucify yourself literally or physically. This is a death to self-will.

It's not enough to just cry over your situation. Don't stop there or you'll remain in a place of self-pity and won't be able to break through to the joy! If you will be like Jesus, willing to do whatever it takes to be like Him, then look to Him – the author and finisher of your faith. Just the hope of being like Him will purify you (1 John 3:3).

If you don't allow the Lord to take you all the way through the crucifixion process, then you'll remain wounded. If you are wounded, you will look for "healing." You will want to escape the pain involved of surrendering your will to the Father's. You may seek approval, acceptance, and attention from people as a substitute, but that is not what you really need. Instead of looking to go *through* the situation and see God's work done in you, you may think avoiding the uncomfortable is the better way to go. You may be looking for a way out – a way of escape. This process may feel like you're failing, you're being humiliated, or you're losing something that you don't want to let go of, but the more you adjust and surrender to Him, the easier it gets.

Remember that dying to yourself is not failure. It may be failure in the eyes of some but it's not in the eyes of God and He's the only one who matters. You might be afraid to lose yourself in God but that's the safest place you can be – lost in Him -- surrounded by His presence. It's the only way to true life. It's the only way you can live the resurrected life that He's called you to. Remember the kernel of wheat has to fall in the ground and die otherwise it remains alone (John 12:24). When you try to hold on and "save" your life and save your feelings and protect your emotions and keep yourself from getting ridiculed or persecuted, then you're just causing more pain for yourself. Once you determine to identify with Him and not be ashamed of your identification with Him then you are on your way to living in the freedom and victory of His resurrection! (Romans 1:16).

7. Laying Your Life

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. *John 15:13 NASB*

The death walk is a love walk. The love of God compels you to lay down your life for others. What does it look like to live this way? It doesn't (necessarily) mean that you physically die for someone else, but to lay down your life is to lay down your time, your energy, your talent, your money. It means you prefer your brother above yourself (Romans 12:10). Now it doesn't mean that you don't keep any time, money etc. for yourself. It doesn't mean a total neglect of yourself or your family. Of course not because if you did that you would become a burden on others. Not only that, but how can you love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31) if you don't love yourself? No, it doesn't mean you neglect your own needs, although God may, and most assuredly will, ask you to give sacrificially at times.

God wants you to be able to give physically, financially, emotionally etc. to others. So of course you have to have these things yourself to give, but if you only look out for yourself and you hoard these things with an attitude of greediness, selfishness, and covetousness, then you won't be walking in the love of God. The love of God lays down its life for others (John 15:12).

Jesus called this the greatest kind of love, and He's called you to walk in this kind of love toward your brothers and sisters in Christ, just as He did for you. When you lay down your life for another you're not thinking about how that person is mistreating you. You're not thinking about their "sin" and how bad they are. Your focus is on what you can do to remain in the love of God and follow Jesus' example.

It's very easy to want to justify not walking in the love of God because someone else isn't. When you take note of how rude someone else is being then it's tempting to feel that you have a good excuse for not loving them. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). By not taking account of the sins against you then you are walking the way of the Kingdom—you are truly laying your life down like Jesus said. How far do you go with this? That's something you and God answer together. Jesus went so far as to die a humiliating death for our sake. This was the Father's will for Him. We each seek Him for our call, while our hope is to continually become more like Jesus. It is this hope that purifies (1 John 3:2-3).

1. What is something you control that is precious to you? (Your time, possessions, skill, creativity, money, energy, etc.)

2. What is something you could do to use this precious thing for the benefit of another? (Even a “small” thing).

3. When you think about doing it, is your attitude one of dread or guilt? Or is it a willing and joyful attitude? (Be honest!)

4. Ask the Holy Spirit if this is something He would have you do, or if there is something else He would have you do to follow Jesus’ example of laying down His life for others.

Know that God understands that you need time to yourself. You need money for yourself etc. However, if you *only* think of yourself and don’t give any of your life to others then are you walking in the love of God? Even though He meets your needs, at times He may ask you to put others first and give sacrificially.

**“I am willing to lay down my life – my time, money, gifts etc.
for my friends, as Jesus did for me, according to the will of God for me.”**

8. Interested in Their Interests

Do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:4 NASB

Yes you need to take care of your own things but you should also look after each other's things. You should look after the interests of each other and not just your own interests. It's not all about you. You are not more important than anyone else. You may think you are, and feel like you are, but to walk the death-love walk you need to understand that every human being is just as important as you are.

Once during a time of worship at church I felt the heart of God and I understood that even just one person's pain hurt Him. He hates to see one person in pain and yet there are millions of people in pain throughout the earth. I realized at that moment how narrow my thinking had been. Without realizing it, I had felt that only my pain mattered because it was the only pain I felt. For a brief moment, I felt the pain of people throughout the world as if it were my own pain. I felt a glimpse of the great love that God has toward all of us. I felt His love for every person on the planet, no matter who they were. Experiencing the vastness of His love for that brief moment was awesome! He wants us to care for each other like we would ourselves.

Of course you know that you only have control over your own life. You don't have control over other people's lives and in that sense, it's important for you to make decisions to do with your life what will please God. You can't control others or make their lives be pleasing to God like you think they should, but you can care for their life and their interests like you would your own. You can have that kind of love for them. This love is in your heart. It's been put there by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

People know Christianity is about loving and giving to others and that we "should" be kind and giving toward others. Of course we should, but not out of a sense of religious duty. The thing to pray and seek God for is to have the same heart-motive that He does, and to ask Him to help you be sincere in your love and not just "put in your time" so to speak (Romans 12:9).

Do you see the value in what those around you value? You know why you value what you do, but do you understand why your loved ones value what they do? When you take the time to listen to what is important to others you will learn some things. You will gain a new perspective and outlook that you didn't have before. Rather than spending time trying to get others to see things from your point of view, you now have the freedom to look at things from their point of view.

1. Take a minute to give your cares to the Lord so your thoughts are free to think about someone else. If you feel there's something pressing you must do to take care of a need of your own then write it down here and take care of it after this worksheet.

2. Do you know what the greatest needs and desires are in the lives of those close to you? Not just your spouse and children but also your friends, co-workers, fellow Christians, etc.? Pick one or two people and list those things you are aware of here.

3. What are the hobbies or personal interests of the same people mentioned above?

4. Are you able to take some time today or tomorrow and either pray for their need, or spend time researching a subject they are interested in so you can show your interest in their interest? If so, write down what you will do here.

Know that God wants you to take care of your own needs because you can't expect someone else to do that for you. However, as you consider what your own needs are, you can expand your thinking to include the needs of others and be open for God to use you to help meet other people's needs as well.

"I will consider the needs of others and not just my own needs."

9. Going the Extra Mile

Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. *Matthew 5:41 NASB*

To die to yourself means that if someone asks you to do something for them, you go beyond what they've required. God is that way, He gives exceeding, abundantly, beyond all that we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). When you do this it shows that you are not carrying an attitude. It shows your generosity and your willingness to give to them. It shows that they have not forced you to do anything that you are not willing to give. You give and you are happy to do so. You have laid down your life and are happy to do so.

Now of course there will be those who may try to take advantage of you, but a dead person isn't concerned with that. You will be concerned with obeying God first. There may be times God will tell you to take care of your own needs or your family's needs before someone else's. He may tell you not to cast your pearls – your treasures – before swine or before those who devour what is precious to you without appreciating the value of it (Matthew 7:6). However, there also may be times that the Lord wants you to be willing to give to someone *even though* in their mind they are trying to take advantage of you (Luke 6:29-35).

The key here is submitting your will to God's. If you are concerned about being forced or manipulated into doing something, then your giving will not be willing or joyful. God is looking at your heart – your attitude – not just your actions. Being able to give or do a favor for those who are unappreciative is the kind of willing generosity Jesus talked about His followers demonstrating. He gave us this example by dying for the sins of the ones who crucified Him. Seek to be a joyful, willing giver – sincerely from your heart and not one who gives as a sense of duty with a grudging attitude (2 Corinthians 9:7).

1. When someone asks you to do something for them do you normally do so cheerfully or grudgingly? What are the things that you feel might get in the way of giving cheerfully?

2. Can you think of a specific time recently when you went above and beyond what someone asked you to do?

3. If someone asked you to do a favor for them in the near future would you be willing/able to set aside your plans to do it? What plans do you have that would make it difficult or seemingly impossible to do? Can you work around it?

4. Take an honest look at your heart. Are you willing to do “favors” for others, and go the extra mile, as if you were doing it for God Himself?

Know that your first obligation is to God, and you can't allow anyone else to run your life and control you to meet their every whim. However, those times that you do give to someone, do so cheerfully and willingly, and when you can, do more than they ask to show the abundant love and blessing of God, and so they don't feel that they inconvenienced you or owe you.

“I will give to others cheerfully and go above and beyond what they ask me to do when I am able to do so.”

10. Live & Die By Faith

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. *Galatians 2:20 NASB*

Here it is. You are crucified with Christ and He lives in you. The life you now live in the flesh you live by faith. You live by faith in the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. He is the author and finisher of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). God is the Master Designer and will make your life beautiful, interesting, alive, and vibrant if you will just yield to Him.

It's not you alone any longer that is living in your body, but it's Christ in you. Christ in you is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Christ living in you is the hope you have of riding on the glory wave. If you're going to live and walk in the glory of a resurrected life in Christ, then it happens as you die to your old self and live your new life in Christ.

Jesus lived His life always pleasing the Father. He lived a true life of faith. He said that He always did what pleased the Father (John 8:29) and He always did what He saw Him do (John 5:19). Jesus was close to God the Father. They were One. They were of one mind and one heart. Jesus understood the ways of God. He understood the ways of the Kingdom. He knew that God's ways were best and He trusted Him. He didn't decide to change the Father's plan once He was here and set up His Kingdom a different way. He knew God's way was the best way. He lived by faith and He died by faith.

You can follow His example. To be crucified with Christ means that you will follow this same path that Jesus did. The path of the Father's will. You will see the wisdom in living according to the ways that Jesus taught. You'll see that His ways are the ways of God and that those who will follow His way will be living in the glory of God's Kingdom. What this means is that when you feel the need to get even with someone who has wronged you, or expose a sin in another person, or boast in yourself, that you will die to those feelings and follow Jesus' example instead. Even though you may not understand completely, and the desire for revenge may be very strong, you will choose to trust God instead and do it His way. You will forgive and love. You will be humble and sincere. You will live and die by faith. Even in those times when a brother or sister in Christ needs to be confronted regarding a sin (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1) you will do so, treating them as you would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). As a result, you will share in the love of Jesus and the Father. You will share in the joy of the resurrected life!

1. Do you understand that as a Christian, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that you are to glorify God in your body? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
2. Do you understand that as a Christian, presenting your body a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, is your spiritual service of worship? (Romans 12:1).
3. Do you understand that you have the option not to let sin reign in your body, but you can present your body as an instrument of righteousness to God? (Romans 6:12-13).
4. Take a few minutes to look up the above Scriptures and meditate on them, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of His Word to you.

Know that God doesn't expect you to overcome sin on your own without His born-again nature in you, and His Spirit in you. Jesus was the only one to obey God perfectly, which is why we need Him and His new nature in us. However, our soul may still have snags – strongholds – that need to come down, that we need to crucify. You live this new life in Christ by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself up for you.

**“I lay aside and crucify the old nature which opposes Christ.
I will live my new life by faith.”**

11. Finding the Hidden Life

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. *Colossians 3:3 NASB*

Your new life is found hidden with Christ in God. To die to yourself doesn't mean you have no life. You have true life—eternal life. However, this life is hidden with Christ in God. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who found a treasure hid in a field and when he found it, he hid it, and joyfully went and sold all that he had and bought the field (Matthew 13:44). He knew the value of that treasure and was willing to give everything up for it. When you see the value of living the new life in Christ you will gladly “sell all” by dying to yourself and through your death inherit the new life—full of treasure and blessing—that your heavenly Father has for you.

Whatever you currently have, your own accomplishments and the things you are so proud of, are nothing compared to the life He has for you. You may think that what you've accomplished in life makes you who you are and adds value to your life, but in reality, only discovering the treasure of having Him in your heart, of being His temple, and doing the work He's called you to do for His kingdom, will bring the joy you long for.

When you find this hidden life in Christ, it doesn't mean that Jesus is something you *add to your* current life. It means you sell all. It means you *exchange* your old life for the new life. If you just try to add Jesus to your life then you'll be looking for ways you can fit Him in, instead of giving Him the full place He deserves. Get rid of the old life—replace it—with the new, hidden life in Christ.

The reason that this new life is hidden in Christ and not somewhere else is because He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He died and took the punishment for all our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). The only way to reach the Father is through Jesus Christ. He bridges the gap. He is the mediator. He is the advocate (1 John 2:1). He is the light. He shows you the way. He is the way. You're lost without Him because there is no way anyone can stand before the purity of God and live. God is perfect. He is true holiness. He is true justice. None of us can stand before Him in our own condition, but you can now because of Jesus. He becomes your righteousness as you believe in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). And He sent the Holy Spirit so you can have fellowship with both the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

This new life is also a hidden life because you become willing to live a life of humility. You're not concerned with boasting in yourself or promoting yourself. You are willing to love and serve others. You're willing to take a back seat to others and encourage and support them in what they are doing. You're willing to do as Jesus said and when you give, you don't let your left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matthew 6:3). You don't always have to be the center of attention. You've learned that the greatest joy and satisfaction comes from living this way and once you've tasted of it there is nothing anyone can do to compare!

1. Take some time to think about the fact that God loves you and desires to be intimate with you. Imagine yourself surrounded (hidden) with His love and allow that feeling to consume you to the point where you will not be looking for people, or accomplishments, to fill any void in your life.
2. Can you relate to the man who found the treasure in the field and went and “sold all” to buy the field? Is Jesus worth that much to you, where you would give all to have Him in your life? If not, what is standing in the way?
3. Ask yourself if you sincerely believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father, and to heaven. Have you been told otherwise? Has that part of your thinking changed since you’ve believed in Jesus, so you now understand that He is the ONLY way? What thoughts might prevent you from believing that?
4. Pick a person you will be talking to soon and think of how you can live the hidden life in Christ by not talking about yourself to them so much. How can you encourage them instead, or speak into their life what God would have them know?

Know that God the old nature desires to boast and exalt itself. When you seek praise and recognition from people for your own goodness you are keeping them from the message of grace that will bring freedom to their life. Only Jesus can set them free – not your own good works.

**“I will not boast in my own accomplishments
but desire to become intimate with You so I can glow with Your love.”**

12. Finding Purpose and Gain Through Loss

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. *Philippians 1:21 NASB*

Paul is talking about physical death here. He's saying that he will gain something when he dies because he will be in the presence of Christ. In the meantime, he lived his life here on earth in Christ. His life was not his own. He knew he had been bought with a price and was to glorify God with his life (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). When you understand that Jesus has given you a life that you could never have attained on your own, you will gladly give your life back to Him. Your life was purchased with His own blood and you have an opportunity at a fresh start. If you were so far in debt that you had no hope of ever getting out, and someone came along and paid off all your bills and bought you a new house and a new car, you would now have the opportunity to start over. By taking good care of your new house and car and paying attention to how you handle your money you would never have to go back into debt again, but you would have to give up your old way of thinking and your old spending habits that got you into debt in the first place. In the same way, we need to renew our mind with the Word of God, surrendering our soul to Him.

Each one of us has specific gifts and talents placed within us. Because of the new life Jesus bought for you, you now have the freedom to live out your specific purpose. We're not all the same. We are each unique. We are all to be like Christ but unique in our expression of Him. You will not feel the most fulfilled and satisfied when you pursue mindless entertainment, any more than living just on desserts will not sustain you for every long. Living for entertainment becomes shallow and empty. Adam had a purpose in the garden. Mankind was created for a purpose. You, individually, were created for a purpose. Your fulfillment and the substance of your life comes from doing the will of the Father. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish his work." (John 4:34). Doing the will of the Father gives great strength and substance to your life.

Not only will you gain something when you die physically by being in the presence of Christ, but you will also gain something when you die to yourself and live in Christ here on earth. You are not your own, you've been bought with a price. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Living your purposeful life in Christ is what will happen when you die to yourself and follow Him, and it will be a gain. It will not be a loss at all. Finding your purpose and place in Christ is something worth gaining. That's the beauty of this whole "death" process is that your life becomes beautiful, fruitful, and purposeful. Life becomes meaningful. It becomes enjoyable. It's not a drudgery at all but is marked with the life, love, peace, and joy of God! (Matthew 11:28-30).

13. True Success

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ. *Philippians 3:8 NASB*

Paul said that whatever he had accomplished in his life was nothing compared to getting to know Jesus Christ intimately. Paul had a long list of accomplishments too. They were even things he had done while he thought he was serving God, but compared to the intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ his accomplishments were nothing. They were like waste.

Paul knew that he had always been proud of his accomplishments. People have a tendency to do that. We have a tendency to become proud of what we do. We sometimes teach our kids that they are loved to the extent of their behavior or accomplishments. It's true that you don't want to become lazy and un-motivated, but at the same time you don't want to put all of your worth and value into what you do. Paul knew that he couldn't think for a minute that his righteousness – or his right relationship with God – had anything to do with what he had accomplished as a Pharisee. The only reason he was able to think he had a right relationship with God was because of his faith in Jesus Christ. He came to realize that this relationship with Him was worth more than anything else.

True success means that you seek to know Jesus Christ more intimately, and the reason you do is because you have discovered that knowing Him, and coming to know Him and the Father through the Holy Spirit, is better than any reward that might come through your own achievements. It comes down to priorities. What do you value? What do you consider to be worth a lot? Is it the possessions and prestige that comes from what you can accomplish through your work? Or is it the intimacy with Jesus Christ that brings you into the Kingdom of God? Do you condone a lifestyle where you do what you have to in order to get ahead no matter what? Or do you prefer the way of the Kingdom which teaches love and humility?

Ultimately, your heart will only be satisfied when you receive the love of God. You may be trying to substitute that love with approval and acceptance from others. There may be a time to seek the opinion of others. There's nothing wrong with seeking out wise counsel (Proverbs 11:14), but the purpose of that is to gain greater understanding into the ways of God and not to find out how you can gain approval from a certain person or group. True success may be defined very differently from how most people in your life define it. God's opinion and definition of success is the only one that really matters and the only one that will satisfy your heart! (Isaiah 55:8).

1. Are you, or have you previously been, proud of your accomplishments in life? Are there any that you found out later weren't right in the eyes of God, or ended up failing somehow?

2. Can you accept the fact that your accomplishments won't bring you salvation? Do you understand that the old nature of the soul, where the center of pride is, is what needs to be changed to think like God, so you define "success" as He does? (Romans 12:1-2).

3. Do you value intimacy with the Lord above all else?

4. Are you willing to re-define your definition of success to match God's? To change your thoughts to become like His? (Isaiah 55:8).

Know that the Bible says in the abundance of counselors there is victory, so God does instruct you to seek counsel from others at times. Yet if you seek approval and acceptance from people rather than intimacy with God then you are still seeking from an unfulfilling place.

"I will value God's opinion more than man's."

14. Free from the Trap

For he who has died is freed from sin. *Romans 6:7 NASB*

Sin is really about selfish personal enjoyment. At its core, it is the soul exalting its will against the Father. You'll see the roots of it in self-will or self-justification. It ends up bringing you into bondage and eventual death—both spiritual and physical (James 1:13-16, Romans 6:23, Proverbs 14:12). If you don't think it brings you down that path, then you are still deceived in this area. Until the Holy Spirit reveals this to you, you most likely won't be able to see it.

Sin is enticing, but it is a trap. The only escape is through Jesus Christ. By dying to self, you are freed from the trap, and you have life instead of death. Death is inevitable either way, but one kind of death leads you to true eternal life and the other leads you to eternal death. When you die to yourself and are crucified with Christ you are free from sin and death (Romans 8:2, Galatians 2:20).

Right before Paul wrote this verse, he said that the old man is crucified with Christ so that we no longer have to be slaves of sin. So, he's not talking about being free from sin when we physically die. He's talking about the same thing Jesus meant when He said for us to take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). He's talking about dying to our self and becoming crucified with Christ here in this life on earth. This isn't a physical death; it's one where you lay down your life like we talked about earlier. When you do this then you are not a slave to sin any longer. You are free from sin. Free to love, free to live in the ways of the Kingdom right here on earth. So you can truly reap the benefits of Jesus' crucifixion—to die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).

Does this mean that you will never sin? No. All of us mess up, but when you do, Jesus is your advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). He is the One you call out to. When you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9). Don't think that you will be perfect and never sin, but there is a way to become free from it once again. When you walk in the Light, your fellowship with the Father and the Son is intact, and His blood cleanses you.

The question is, what is your desire? Do you enjoy doing the things that you know are wrong? Are you trying to stay free, or do you keep going back over and over against the tuggings of your conscience? You can't stay free from sin on your own, but you do need to take some responsibility to renew your mind with the Word of God (Romans 12:1-2), and in doing so, bring down the old strongholds of thinking that enslave you to the will of the enemy (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, 2 Timothy 2:26). Sheer willpower alone won't do it, but strength and sanctification from Him will. He is ready and waiting to help you overcome in every way.

1. Do you find yourself struggling with sin? Do you recognize your inability to be free from it?

2. Do you understand the danger of choosing pleasure over truth, and the deception that brings? (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

3. Are you aware of your own attempts to justify yourself, make excuses for sin, or blame others? If you are aware, that's the Holy Spirit revealing it to you, and there is hope for you to overcome!

4. Find Scriptures that speak of the overcoming power and life of God that is in you as His child, and in the new nature you've received through faith in Jesus Christ. (For example, 1 John 4:4; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:37-39; Romans 6:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:2). Meditate on these Scriptures daily and allow them to transform your thinking.

Know that God has provided for your freedom from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and your faith in Him. You have the power available to you to overcome sin, but you have to be willing to change both your thoughts and actions through His Word and Spirit for this to be a reality.

"I will study the Scriptures to change my thinking to align with God's, and to bring me into intimacy with Him, so my desires are changed."

15. Trusting the Righteous Judge

And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; 1 Peter 2:23 NASB

Jesus was falsely accused. He was misunderstood. One of the most frustrating things you can experience is to be accused of something you didn't do, or to have your intentions misunderstood. When you do something wrong and suffer for it, you may not like it but at least you feel like you had it coming so it's easier to take the consequences of your actions, (Unless you're playing the "blame game" and haven't yet learned to take responsibility for your actions). But when people lie or exaggerate just to bring shame or judgment your way, the old nature of the soul is tempted to want to rise up and defend yourself, or to sling accusations and fault findings back at your accusers. Jesus could have easily found fault with His accusers, but He did not accuse them. He didn't threaten them but instead He committed Himself and His cause to the Righteous Judge (1 Peter 2:21-23). If you have died to yourself, you will be content to commit your cause to God. It's when you feel the need to defend yourself or to dish out punishment that you know you have not truly died.

The key here is committing your cause to God – the Righteous Judge. A love for the truth and a desire for proper justice to be done needs to develop in your innermost being so you will be happy for God's justice to prevail rather than your own desires (1 Corinthians 13:6). God is the most fair and righteous judge you could ever hope to have. Ultimately, He makes all the rules, and He is good. He is loving, merciful, and just. You couldn't hope to have a better judge. However, you must commit your cause, or your case, to Him. Trust Him to deal with the people in your life who are accusing or mistreating you. That's what Jesus did, and He could have found plenty to accuse those people of; while they had nothing to legitimately accuse Him of (John 8:46; John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). The way Jesus did it, and did it right, was by committing His cause to God the Father.

When you commit your cause to God you won't need to argue with others to try and prove your point. You won't need to defend yourself and prove that you are not what they say you are. You won't need to blame others for the things you do wrong. You won't need to plan ways to get even. You won't need to rally a group of people together to side with you. You simply turn it over to the Lord and let Him judge the situation. Since God ultimately will judge you as well as them, it's in your best interest to handle the situation according to His ways and not yours!

1. When falsely accused, how have you typically responded in the past with your un-renewed soul? (Anger, fault-finding, slander, sabotage, depression etc...)

2. Think of recent accusations made from others against you. Could there be any truth to what they might be saying? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what areas you might need to change or do something about?

3. Take some time to mediate on how Jesus responded to those who falsely accused Him in 1 Peter 2:19-25:

¹⁹ For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Know that God understands how difficult it is when you are falsely accused or misunderstood. He doesn't want you to internalize your feelings and let them burn in your heart, but His desire is for you to truly commit yourself and your cause to Him who will judge the situation righteously. When you do, you can walk free from all bitterness.

"I commit myself and my cause to You who judges righteously in all situations."

16. Good for Bad

If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. *Luke 6:33 NASB*

We praise our children when they do nice things for us – draw us a picture, give us a hug or say something kind--and rightfully so. However, we would do well to teach them to do good to those who are not nice to them as well. All of us need to learn this lesson. It's much easier to do kind things to those who are nice to you. It's good to show your appreciation to someone by giving them a gift or an encouraging note, but Jesus takes that one step further. He calls you to take all your own feelings out of it. Take yourself out of the center and do kind things for those who are not nice to you, to those who are not good to you. If you only do good to those who do good to you then you are no better than the sinners. (Jesus said it!) You'll need to put your feelings and opinions aside and die to yourself in order to do this (see Luke 6:27-36).

If you have set yourself up in your own mind as judge then you will try and make sure that people "get what they've got coming." That's the soul trying to take charge again. However, it's not your job to bring judgment on people. That's God's job. Because He knows people's hearts, and is not corrupt in His own heart, His judgments will be just and right. You'll take a lot of pressure off yourself if you will submit to Him as the Righteous Judge and let Him be God instead of trying to take His place (Psalm 19:9; Hebrews 10:30).

Once you decide to do good to those who are not nice to you, then you need to examine your heart and make sure you're not doing it out of a feeling of superiority or that you're not doing it grudgingly, just because you feel like you have to (2 Corinthians 9:7). It's easy to do good sarcastically to someone who you might feel is not deserving of it. By that I mean that you do something nice for them, but you do so with an inner sarcasm and feeling that you are superior to them because you are being nice to them when they don't deserve it. That kind of arrogant attitude is not what Jesus meant! If you are going to walk in the love of God it needs to be a sincere love. One that is doing the right thing because it's the right thing. One that does what it does because of a love for God and a desire to do what He says. One that can see past the rudeness of the other person and see the hurting heart inside.

You also want to look into your own heart and make sure you're not holding onto any bitterness or resentment toward the person. You may be able to make yourself do good toward them, yet still hold resentment inside. Again, you want your love to be a sincere love. You will need to put the will of God over your own feelings in order to do this. You'll need to draw from His love and mercy. It is possible! He will help you! The Holy Spirit is given to us to help us overcome! (Romans 8:9-14, 26-27). Ask for a fresh infilling of His Spirit!

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you have any strongholds in your thinking that cause you to think you should only do good to those who do good to you (Luke 6:27-37). What is He showing you?
2. Ask Him to show you if there is any vengeance or bitterness in your heart against anyone who has wronged you. If so, seek repentance and forgiveness from Him. (2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10).
3. Ask Him to show you if there is any sense of superiority or arrogance in your heart, or in your thinking, which causes you to do good out of a wrong motive and not sincerely.
4. Ask Him to show you if there is any unforgiveness in you, any sin you are hanging on to, or anything in your thinking that opposes Him. Once again, seek repentance and forgiveness if there is. Ask Him for a fresh infilling of His Spirit, empowerment to overcome and live the holy and righteous life He has called you to!

Know that God doesn't want you to become in bondage to a person who thinks they can treat you unkindly and expect you to always return with a good deed. However, He does not want you to limit your goodness and kindness only to those who are nice to you. He sent Jesus before we were kind or good. Jesus died for the ungodly.

**"I am willing to be kind and do good,
even to those who are not good to me."**

17. Blood, Not Just Tears

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;
Hebrews 12:4 NASB

What is sin? It's not just the obvious sins like murder, adultery, stealing etc. It's also selfish behavior, criticism, accusation, gossip, and slander to name a few more. Anything that opposes the will of God. Jesus said if you would love God first and your neighbor as yourself then you would fulfill all the law (Matthew 22:36-40; Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:10). You keep the commands of God when you walk in love. The writer of Hebrews said they had not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding blood. Have you? Are you willing to die resisting sin and selfishness? We think we do well if we resist to the point of *tears*, but how many of us resist to the point of *blood*? That's how determined we need to be if we are going to successfully die to ourselves and walk the love walk (Hebrews 12:4).

We know we have to resist the devil (James 4:7), but are you blaming the devil when it's really your own lust that is drawing you to sin? (James 1:14). As hard as this may be to admit, admitting it is just what you need in order to gain victory over it. Every person needs to come to a point where they admit to the sin in their own life. You need to confess your sin and *then* He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Confessing it, admitting it, is the first step. Sometimes this step is very difficult. It's hard to admit you've been wrong. However, when you do, your fellowship with the Father and Son is restored. What a joy! (1 John 1:7).

There could be many reasons why you don't want to admit you've been wrong. It may be pride. Or you may feel that you have to hang on to being right because your self-worth is tied up in that, and admitting to being wrong would mean, in your mind, that you are worthless. (Which of course is not true. You are priceless to God). Or you may feel that you've done the same thing wrong so many times that you can't possibly admit to it and confess it to God one more time, but that is exactly what you need to do. As hard as it may be, you need to feel the pain of that sin. Of course you don't want to hang on to that pain forever. The Lord wants you to confess it so He can forgive you and you can get on with your life free from the sin and the pain it brings. However, when you sin, you need to go through that confession process which is painful. It's all a part of dying to self. It's all a part of submitting your will to the Father, of not wanting to take His place as the one in charge of your life.

So much of this dying process is connected to the desires of your heart. God sees your heart and soul very clearly. Let Him help you to see it as well. He sees how pure your desires are, or impure. When you *want to* be like Him and live a life without a selfish motivation then you have made a giant step into the Kingdom of God. If you don't want to live an unselfish life, then God is very much aware of that and you can't fool Him no matter how hard you try. You may be able to fool yourself, or others, but you can't fool Him. Ask Him to show you your heart. Pour out your soul. Ask Him to show it to you. Tell Him you want to have a pure heart. Just having the desire to be like Jesus is cleansing (1 John 3:3).

18. The Love Motivation

And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 NASB

It's not about the act of giving, it's about the heart. If you're giving without love that is not a Christ-like motivation. It may be out of a sense of obligation, or to seek recognition, or some other motivation that is not born of love. The purpose of giving is not to see what you can get out of it. If your purpose and motive for giving is not out of a heart of love, then there is no profit or advantage to you. It may still profit the one you're giving to, at least temporarily, but there won't be any true profit to you because of it. Jesus said to let your light shine *in such a way* that people will see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16). The good that you do is not supposed to be for your own recognition, but for bringing glory to God the Father and to accomplish His purposes here in the earth.

Your love in giving is a result of your love for God and a willingness to obey Him and keep His commands. This heart of love comes because of your gratitude and thankfulness to Him for what He has done for you. You love Him (and therefore others) because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). You worship Him because you are truly grateful to Him. Your obedience is an expression of your love toward Him, and when you truly love others and give to others out of a heart of true love it will be because of your love for God (John 15:10-12). When you have that kind of love guiding your actions then your giving not only blesses others but profits you as well.

God wants to have an intimate relationship with you. He doesn't want you to do all sorts of nice things for others just because you feel it's your duty or obligation. Or because you're trying to earn some sort of recognition or appreciation from Him or from others. He wants you to become so close to Him that you think like He thinks, love what He loves, and hates what He hates. He wants your heart to beat in sync with His.

When you see the goodness of God and how His way of doing things is really the best way for everyone then it becomes a pleasure to do things His way. It becomes exciting. It feels good inside. His heart has become your heart and you enjoy giving in the same way that God enjoys giving. God is not a selfish God. He loves to give. He enjoys giving. Look at the sacrifice He made when He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, but He did it knowing that in the end the joy would outweigh the sorrow of the moment. The joy of having many people who would be able to have a heart like His far outweighed the grief of sending Jesus to die for us. Thank God He did it because having a loving and giving heart is much better than hanging on to a stingy and greedy one.

1. Jesus said the works that He did, those who believe in Him will do also (John 14:12). And He always did those things that pleased the Father (John 8:29). In the same way, the good things we do are not for our glory. They are not to make us look good, but to bring glory to the Father (Matthew 5:16). Take a look at your good works, your giving, and examine them prayerfully and honestly. Do you see any room for a deeper love motivation in the good things that you do?

2. To keep our love motivation in check, we need to be sure we love God first, and others second (Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34). If our love for others springs out of our love for God, then our motive will be right. We will remain in worship and obedience to Him in all we do. However, if we love others more than we love God, we might attempt to use God to serve the needs of others. This might cause us to look for Him to compromise His principles or His will. Think of someone you know that has a need. How might you keep your love for God first before you give toward this person's need?

3. True and sincere love will spring out of our love for God, which increases as we spend time with Him and in His Word. It is evidenced by our gratitude toward Him, and our worship of Him. Spend some time remembering what God has done for you and thanking Him for those things. What has He done for you that you are thankful for?

4. Worship is an acknowledgement of God's superiority over us. It is a surrender to His will. It is always right to consider the will of God in anything we do – giving or otherwise. Take some time to worship the Lord and acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus over you.

Know that at times you will need to give even when you don't "feel" like it, but you don't want to allow a feeling of bitterness or resentment to fill your heart, and you don't want to give out of a sense of obligation or duty. You want to give as an expression of your appreciation, worship, and love for God.

**"God, I am grateful for Your love and for all You've done for me.
I determine to be willing to give from a heart of love."**

19. Done in Secret

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. *Matthew 6:5 NASB*

Do you ever look around to see who's watching when you do something good? Do you think about all the people who know about what you did? Do you talk about the good things you've done? What is your motive in doing so? Is it to glorify God or yourself? Have you ever met an "important" person and were conscious of who might be watching you speak to him or who might be aware that you were with him or her?

Selfish ambition is exhausting. It will wear you out. Jude spoke of those who are like clouds without water (Jude 12). Like balloons that are easily deflated you strive to exalt and promote yourself and call attention to yourself. It's hard work and even if it appears that you've gotten the recognition from people you were looking for, in the end it's all for nothing. If the reward you are looking for is praise and recognition from people then that is the only benefit you will receive for what you are doing (Matthew 6:1).

You could ask yourself, what are you really looking for when you try to impress someone? The reasons for doing it may vary from person to person. You could be insecure and looking for reassurance that you're okay the way you are. Or you could be insecure in who you are and want to be accepted so bad that you're willing to pretend you're something you're not just to get the acceptance that you need. You could be looking for acceptance from God or doing something out of guilt. On the other hand, you could be looking for more than acceptance. You could be looking for respect, admiration, or even worship. You could be looking for people to put you on a pedestal and praise you for what you're doing. Feeling that you're "better" than others might be the only way you can feel like you're okay.

How you were raised might affect how you relate to people in this way, but there comes a point in time when you can no longer blame it on how you were raised. The Lord wants to help you get free from the past so you can live the life He's called you to. It's a life of freedom, but also humility. When you are humble, you won't care how much attention or recognition you get for doing what you do. You do it because you have the heart of God. You do it because of love. You're not looking for any other reward. When the love of God has filled your heart, you won't need any other reward. His love brings such a great peace and sense of security that you won't feel the need for anything else. If someone doesn't send you a Thank You card it won't matter to you. If someone doesn't even know that you were the one who blessed them it won't matter to you. You won't feel the need to "toot your own horn" and be sure everyone knows that you are the one who did the good deed. There is great freedom in being able to live with this kind of humble attitude.

1. What are some “good” things you’ve done recently? (Prayed for someone, gave money or gifts, did a kind act, etc.) Were you aware of who was watching or who knew about what you were doing? Could there have been any pride motivation there? (Matthew 6:1).
2. Have you ever felt pressured to give because “everyone else” was doing so, and you were afraid you would look “bad” by not participating in the giving?
3. Just because you see a need, doesn’t necessarily mean that you should do something to meet that need. Do you normally pray and seek the Lord what He would have you to do when you become aware of a need? (2 Corinthians 9:7).
4. Is there something you can do for someone in such a way that nobody knows it was you? (If possible, not even the person you are doing it for)? (Matthew 6:3-4).

Know that God rewards you for the good that you do and He truly appreciates what you give and sacrifice for Him, but if your reason for doing something is to gain recognition or approval from people then you have your reward—your only reward. Dying to self means you're not looking to draw attention to yourself, but to do the will of God from the heart.

“I am willing to become willing to do good deeds in secret without being seen of men.”

20. Room to Grow

I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. *John 8:37 NASB*

The people Jesus was talking to did not receive what He was saying. When a person hardens their heart to the Word of God by not accepting what He says then they are actually *rejecting* what He says. When they reject the Word of God, they are rejecting Jesus Himself and will be judged by the very Word they reject (John 12:48). They are, in a sense, seeking to crucify Him by not allowing His Word to live in their heart. Instead, we need to seek to be crucified *with* Him. We need to seek to die to ourselves and allow our thinking and believing to be conformed to His Word. We need to give His Word place in our heart, and renew our minds with it, removing the strongholds of the soul (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

A hardened heart is unmovable, un-pliable and is not fertile ground for the seed of His Word to grow and expand in. Jesus spoke of the Word being sown in the hearts of people and the stony heart was one where the seed withered because the stones didn't allow the Word-seed to have the room it needed to grow (Matthew 13:20-21). If a seed is not given room to grow then the root system can't develop, the seed won't receive the nourishment it needs to keep the plant strong, and the plant will not have the support to be able to stand up or hold up during times of intense heat, storm, or drought.

When you give the Word of God place in your life, you will embrace the truths of God even though it means you have to give up the room in your heart. You may have certain opinions and beliefs that are contrary to what Jesus taught. You may think a certain way that is in contrast to the Bible (Isaiah 55:8-9). You may have a tendency to try and make the Word of God fit into your beliefs. I know there have been times I've opened the Bible in an attempt to find Scripture to support what I thought was right, but if you are going to give the Word of God place in your life then you need to put God's opinion higher than yours. You may need to adjust some of your opinions, or you may need to throw them out completely. The stony ground will need to become soft if you want the Word of God to grow freely in your heart.

The people that Jesus was talking to in this Scripture became angry and were looking to kill Him. He said the reason they wanted to kill Him was because His Word had no place in them. The anger was there because they didn't want to change. If they were to receive His words as truth then that would mean that they would have to change their opinions about some things. It's an uncomfortable feeling when something you have solidly believed in becomes challenged. You've been standing on this stone and the Lord says it's time to take it out. You may feel your whole life is being turned upside down, but in the end, when you give up your opinions for His, your heart becomes softer and you're free from those stones that have been clogging up your heart. Now the Word of God has room to grow. Now you can become more like Him. Now you can live in the freedom that His Words bring (John 8:31-32).

1. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God? (John 1:1-4, 14; 1 John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Genesis 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2. What has been the hardest thing in the Bible that you have had trouble putting into practice in your life? How have you handled it? Have you simply ignored it, or did you (sooner or later) submit your will to His and accept His way?

3. Are there still any “stumbling blocks” for you in the Bible that you have a hard time accepting. If so, rather than trying to address each one, go back to your belief in the Lord. Is He truly Lord of your life? Have you made the decision to fully surrender your will to the Father’s, as Jesus gave us example? (Luke 22:42; John 6:38; Hebrews 10:9).

4. Are you willing to fully surrender your opinions, beliefs, and thoughts to agree with God’s? If so, tell Him, and ask the Holy Spirit to do that work in your life.

Know that the Word of God has been put before you to accept and believe. If you do, life and freedom come. But if you don’t, the danger of deception is high. When you are deceived you don’t know you are deceived, and there is no guarantee that the opportunity to be free from the deception of disobedience will be offered to you again.

“Holy Father, I will give Your Word first place in my life.”

21. Addressing the Money Motive

Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." James 4:15 NASB

Once again, we look at our plans. Are the choices you make concerning your life and future being made for reasons other than the will of God for you? In context, James is talking about making a decision to move to another city for a year or so for the purpose of buying, selling and getting gain. Oftentimes money (or the lack of it) is what we base our decisions on. Money becomes the great enabler and the great motivator. If you have an opportunity to take a job in another city for more money, will you just assume God is for it? Will you put your paycheck and income up as a higher priority than God's will (Matthew 6:24)?

Are you willing to use money to serve God with or are you trying to use God to get money? We may do this without thinking about it. We may be in such a habit of looking for money and making money-based decisions that we don't even realize what we are doing. If you don't pray or consider the will of God when you make money-based decisions, then you need to re-adjust your priorities and move God up above money in your thinking in order to live the resurrected life He has called you to (Hebrews 13:5).

A lot of people, even Christians, have been consumed with a complex that makes them always feel they are lacking. They are not content (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6-10). They constantly feel as if what they have is not enough. They're always wanting to make more money. Always wanting to buy more things – more things for the house, or maybe a bigger house, a new car, more clothes, etc. etc. This discontentment is driving people to live beyond their means and to constantly feel they want more.

The answer is not to get more. The answer is to learn to be content. This lack and lust attitude will always be there no matter how much you have, but when you learn to be thankful for what you have, and be at peace, then the feeling of discontentment goes away. You can have joy in your life. You can live in peace. You can love your job instead of despising it.

A lustful and lacking attitude is much like an addiction. It's never satisfied. It always wants more. It's also related to a critical attitude and being a perfectionist. If you're one who is always looking to make things "better" then you'll never be satisfied. You'll always be critical of the way things are. You'll always be focusing on the negative because you're always looking for what's wrong. As long as you are discontent, you will be trying to fix problems in your circumstances thinking that as soon as things are fixed then you can be happy. Yet that never happens. Peace doesn't mean not having any problems, it means being content in the midst of whatever is going on around you. Learn to be content and to live within the current limitations of your life – money, time, and space – and you will flourish with peace, joy, and even prosperity.

1. Do you truly feel that you trust God to take care of you and meet your needs?

2. What are you doing with your time? Do you feel you are doing with your time what God wants you to be doing? (Whether you are employed, have your own business or are a housewife, mother, retired etc.)

3. What are some things you've bought recently that you felt was okay to buy *just because you had the money to buy them*? Have you ever bought anything and realized later that it would have been better not to buy it, or that you really didn't need it?

4. Are there purchases you have made recently that you really didn't have the money to buy? (Had to charge them, borrow from someone, not pay a bill to buy this item. etc...) If so, ask the Lord to remove the lust and discontentment from your heart so you can avoid doing this in the future.

Know that God wants you to have your financial needs met, but He doesn't want money to be your god or for you to serve money. You can't serve both God and money. God is a jealous God and desires for us to have no other gods before Him.

"I will not make decisions based on money but on God's will."

21 Day Summary

"I am willing to follow Your path and not be afraid to lose something."

"I will lay aside my own feelings and remain loyal to Your guidance without doubting You."

**"Lord, I make myself completely vulnerable to You.
I open my heart to fellowship with You and to hear Your heart."**

"I will not look to defend or promote myself. Instead, I will pray for those who mistreat me."

"I will bring all of my plans, hopes and dreams in subjection to Your plans for me."

"I am willing to identify with Christ in all that I do."

**"I am willing to lay down my life – my time, money, gifts etc.
for my friends, as Jesus did for me, according to the will of God for me."**

"I will consider the needs of others and not just my own needs."

**"I will give to others cheerfully and go above and beyond what they ask me to do
when I am able to do so."**

**I lay aside and crucify the old nature which opposes Christ.
I will live my new life by faith."**

**"I will not boast in my own accomplishments but desire to become intimate with You
so I can glow with Your love."**

"I will live in Christ fulfilling the purpose for which I was created and laid hold of."

"I will value God's opinion of me more than man's."

**"I will study the Scriptures to change my thinking to align with God's,
and to bring me into intimacy with Him, so my desires are changed."**

"I commit myself and my cause to God who judges righteously in all situations."

"I am willing to be kind and do good, even to those who are not good to me."

**"I will not have a careless attitude toward sin.
My desire is to remain in fellowship with God."**

**"God, I am grateful for Your love and for all You've done for me.
I determine to be willing to give from a heart of love."**

"I am willing to become willing to do good deeds in secret without being seen of men."

"Holy Father, I will give Your Word first place in my life."

"I will not make decisions based on money but on God's will."

