

Deny Yourself.

A six-week guided practice in laying down our lives and taking up our Christ

Lesson 1: Depending on God – Lay down your crown.

Introduction...

This week's lesson in denying our self to properly focus ourselves on Christ cuts straight to the heart of the matter. We are self-reliant creatures. As a product of culture, upbringing, self-preservation, or simply status quo, we have learned to trust little and do everything for ourselves. Living this lifestyle can feel liberating at first, knowing that you can rely on yourself to get the job done, not having to wait for or trust anyone else who may ultimately leave you disappointed. However, this mentality, this habitual lifestyle we have grown into and now cultivate for ourselves is slowly but surely strangling our faith.

Why would you want to give up control of your own life? Why would you ever want to hand over to God what you believe you can do better, or at least more efficiently? The answer is simple - **because this life you are leading is killing you.** Devoid of faithful response to God, you are alone to defend yourself in this world full of others out for their own self-preservation. It's become a dog-eat-dog world for you, and you know it. You are exhausted. You are afraid of not being enough. You are in need of a savior.

The Good News is this - Jesus Christ saves. It's time to start accepting His place in your life. The first step - lay down your crown. You can't be the king or queen of your own life. It's maddening. **Place Jesus where He belongs - on the throne of your life.**

Scripture Focus...

Fully depending on God involves laying your crown down and seeking a place of humility before God. **Revelation 4:10-11** says,

“They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their being.”

We must take our proper position and recognize who God is and that He alone creates, maintains, and upholds all things.

Meditation...

Intention refers to the underlying motivation for everything we think, say, or do. From the brain’s perspective, when we act in unintended ways, there’s a disconnect between the faster, unconscious impulses of the lower brain centers and the slower, conscious, wiser abilities of the higher centers like the pre-frontal cortex.

Given that the unconscious brain is in charge of most of our decision-making and behaviors, this practice can help you align your conscious thinking with a primal emotional drive that the lower centers care about. Beyond safety, these include motivations like reward, connection, purpose, self-identity and core values.

Setting an intention—keeping those primal motivations in mind—helps strengthen this connection between the lower and higher centers. Doing so can change your day, making it more likely that your words, actions and responses — especially during moments of difficulty—will be more mindful and compassionate.

Christ-Centered Wakeup: **Start with a Purpose**

1. On waking, sit in your bed or a chair in a relaxed posture. Close your eyes and connect with the sensations of your seated body. Make sure your spine is straight, but not rigid.

2. Take three long, deep, nourishing breaths—breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Then let your breath settle into its own rhythm, as you simply follow it in and out, noticing the rise and fall of your chest and belly as you breathe.

3. Ask yourself: “What is my intention for today?”

Repeat the following phrase over and over to yourself as you enter a time of prayer each day:

The Lord is my Shepherd, my King, and my all.

4. Set your intention for the day. For example, “Today, I will be kind to myself; be patient with others; give generously; stay grounded; persevere; have fun; eat well, and remember that I am not alone or in control of all things. I can rely on God more fully when I place Christ at the center of my life.

5. Throughout the day, check in with yourself. Pause, take a breath, and revisit your intention. Notice, as you become more and more conscious of your intentions for each day, how the quality of your communications, relationships, and mood shifts.

Three Points for the Journey:

1. Begin each day this week with your meditation practice (above).
2. Read this week’s Scripture passage each night before you go to bed.
3. Spend time in prayer with God daily, asking (among other things) that you might be able to become more reliant on God and less reliant on yourself in the coming days and weeks.

Prayer:

Holy God, let me be filled with the power of your presence, upheld by your strength, and set free from my own anxieties and worries. Let me be emptied of all that would stand in Your holy way. Amen.