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AMERICAN SNIPER

Canyon View Vineyard Church planted a little satellite church in Kimwood Park thirteen years ago. That park is in Clifton, the poorest area in Grand Junction, and since it is only five minutes from my home my family and I have been attending there for about a year. We meet outdoors under shade trees in the summer and in a tent in the winter.

Last month, Ellis, a man in his 50's, gave his testimony at one of our Sunday services. He told us that because of alcohol and meth he had been homeless for a decade but that he now lives in a little trailer beside the park. He also said that Jesus rescued him from his addictions two months ago. And he told us that some years ago, during his lost years as an addict his wife had stolen his home and all his savings.

After our worship service, several of us met with Ellis and learned that he had been a sniper with the Rangers, an elite army unit, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he had the second highest number of kills - second only to Chris Kyle of "American Sniper" fame.

Ellis had a disability in his shoulders and arms and could touch his face but could not raise his arms any higher than that. He could not lift his elbows away from his sides. He explained that 16 years ago his unit had been involved in a four-day firefight with Isis fighters in Afghanistan and that after they ran out of ammunition they were taken prisoner. The Isis guys had hung him up by his hands for 86 hours, which amounts to three and a half days. The muscles, tendons, nerves in his shoulders and arms had been stretched and ruined beyond repair. He had lived in pain for the past 16 years and hated the Afghanis with a passion.

The minute Ellis told his story I felt sure that God would heal him if he would forgive those guys that tortured him. We explained that to him and led him in prayer. He struggled with saying he forgave them but finally said it. We prayed for healing and

told him to raise his arms up. (Jesus told the man with the withered hand to stretch out his arm, and as he stretched it out he was healed.)

Ellis strained to lift his elbows and with great effort and pain finally lifted them parallel to his shoulders. We told him to put his arms back down and then told him that he was healed and by faith to lift his hands up over his head. He immediately did that, for the first time in 16 years.

Ellis said that his arms and shoulders were very sore, and we continued to pray for him and encouraged him to work the soreness out.

Glory to God!

DENY YOURSELF?

Jesus was very clear about what he wanted from his followers.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.'" (Matthew 16:24)

And Jesus goes even farther. He says in Matthew 10:37, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Holy cow! That is so extreme. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Deny yourself?" What is the "self" we are supposed to deny? Is it our personality?

God is the genius who invented DNA, so that each of us is a unique blend of temperament, giftedness, and life experiences. It is surely not God's plan to deny or destroy all that makes us human and unique. Then what does Jesus mean?

It is clear in the New Testament that the self we are told to deny is our sinful nature or fallen nature. Galatians 5: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For

the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred; jealousy; fits of rage; selfish ambition and envy; drunkenness; and the like.”

I believe the self we are told to deny is also the false identity each of us has constructed which is independent of God. We are by nature self-ish and self-centered. “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

Why do we think it extreme that Jesus demanded that we love Him more than parents or children? We all know someone who gave up parents and spouse and children for their lover, or for alcohol or meth or gambling, or for the pursuit of “success.” Jesus is certainly not telling us not to love our family, but he is saying that love for Him must come first. “Love God with all your heart,....” Putting Christ first purifies our love so that we don’t make an idol of our family.

It is oh, so easy, to say, “I believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that he died for my sins.” But denying our “self” is another matter.

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PEOPLE OF THE LIE

I just reread a book, People of the Lie, that was written over thirty years ago by Scott Peck, a Christian psychiatrist, which sounds like an oxymoron. His book was about “evil,” and he pointed out that psychiatry and our whole society deny the reality of evil and describe evil as sickness.

In the book, Scott described a patient of his that he named Charlene, a woman of 35 years. Charlene had an IQ that was off the charts, but she lived in a fantasy world in which she was the central character. She got one job after another but always got fired after a few months. The reason she got fired was because she made up her own rules and ignored the rules of her new boss. If she was supposed to work from 8:00 till 4:30 she might decide to work from 9:00 till 3:00..... “because I’m smart enough to do the job in less time.” It was a game for her to get everyone upset. Although she was super smart, she had failed out of an undemanding college - because if she was supposed to write a paper about the Founding Fathers, she might turn in a paper about the Beatles. She was self-destructive in every area of life but insisted she enjoyed living that way.

Read the following dialogue Scott had with Charlene: (((What is the meaning of life, I asked her. She said, “How should I know?” You’re a religious person, what does your religion say? “I am not a Christian, my religion speaks of love, not of meaning.” Well, what do Christians say is the meaning of life? She finally said, “We exist for the glory of God.” Well, I asked.

There was a short silence and I thought she might cry. Then she said in a quavering voice, “I can’t do it. There’s no room for me in that. That would be my death.” Then she frightened me when her choked-back sobs became a roar. “I don’t want to live for God. I will not. I want to live for me. My own sake!” I felt a terrible pity for Charlene.))

The Bible says, “Those who belong (my emphasis) to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”(Gal. 5:24) Jesus said, “Take up your cross and follow me.” People say they believe in God, but James said that even the demons believe in God. The question is, do we belong to Christ Jesus?

And we are supposed to take up our cross daily. (1 Cor. 15:31)

During the years I was going to Mexico there was a missionary named Wayne Myers who had lived and served there for over 40 years. He shared with some pastors one time how he kept himself pure and faithful. He said that each morning he started his prayer time by spending 30 minutes on his knees. He would take a deep breath and as he expelled it he would command the evil, the darkness, the rebellion to leave him. He would say, “I take up my cross today, Lord Jesus. Help me to love you and love these people today. I command my flesh, my body, to bow down to you, to die. Fill me with your loving Spirit today, Lord.” Wayne had learned how to die daily and to live for the Lord.

It is a fight to die to self and live for the Lord. None of us does it perfectly, but if we will set that goal before us the Lord promises us a life of love, joy and peace.....and at the end, eternal life with Him. . God is not trying to rob us of life but to give us the life for which we were created.

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HEAVEN IS NOT BORING

Many people think that heaven will be boring, like a loonng church service, but instead of 3

hymns and a sermon you sing 3,000 hymns and the sermon lasts till 2094, and then it starts over. That wouldn't be heaven, would it?

Look around at the infinite variety our God created out of his imagination:

- The clockwork order of the solar system. If the moon were not exactly where it is to cause the tides that cleanse the oceans, life on earth would not be possible. And there are more than 70 other "accidents" that make life possible - such as the perfect blend of oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen in the atmosphere.
- The five senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting
- Dolphins and bats have built in sonar
- The DNA that individuates each person is so complex that a printout on letter sized paper would make a stack over 15 stories high - and that code is in each cell of our bodies.
- Plankton, gold fish, catfish, star fish, sharks, whales

And the list could go on and on. And this is a fallen world. Think what the Creator could do if he really put his best effort into it. We can't really imagine what heaven is like, but the Bible gives us some tantalizing hints.

Many people spend much time worrying about their retirement which lasts only a few years but never give a thought to where they will spend eternity. The most important question of all is: Are you sure you are going to heaven when you die?

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HOPE RISING

(from my Ancient Files)

"Hope Rising" is the name of a book by Kim Meter. I heard her being interviewed one morning by Dr. Dobson. Kim and her husband own a small horse ranch in Bend, Oregon, that is devoted to rescuing abused horses and abused kids. At the time of the interview they had rescued over 300 horses, many so badly battered and malnourished that they could not be touched. They started working with schools, clubs and the social service system several years ago and have discovered a magical connection.

In the interview, Kim told the story of Jimmy, a young man of 17, who had been in and out of the social justice system his whole life. He had been born to a crack mother, one of his arms and hands

was deformed, and he hated everybody including himself. A group of kids were brought to the ranch by the social worker and this apparently took Jimmy by surprise. He quietly asked his case worker, "Doesn't she know I'm a bad kid?"

Kim took Jimmy and seven other boys to a corral to get acquainted with a new horse that had just been rescued. She said it was one of the worst cases of neglect they had ever seen. The horse should have weighed 1,000 lbs. but weighed only 400 lbs., and could barely walk. She explained to the boys that they were trying to socialize the little horse and they must stand very still and not frighten her. She had the boys stand in a circle inside the corral and then brought the mare in. She came in like a little fawn, went around the circle and smelled each boy, then she returned to Jimmy and pressed her head against his chest. Kim said, "Oh, Jimmy, she has chosen you!" Tears ran down Jimmy's face. He stayed with the horse the whole day, grooming and hugging her

The next day when the boys were back at their detention facility Jimmy asked for a private meeting with his counselor and told her what had happened. He grabbed his shirt and started saying, "My heart, my heart, something happened to my heart! I never knew that I could be loved, but if that little horse could love me, and if the people at that ranch could believe in me, then maybe I can believe in myself." And that was the moment when Jimmy decided to change his life.

The Lord Jesus was rejected, wounded, scourged and crucified because of his great love. He wants to come and put his arms around you today and tell you that he did it all because he loves you and believes in you. He came to heal the broken hearted. Let him heal your heart today.

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:

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