

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 and John 17:1-11

Dying to Self

Jesus tells us through his teaching and through his life
that dying to self is the way to abundant life on earth
and eternal life in heaven.

Jesus looked up to heaven and said:
“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify
you...to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.”

Every time Jesus looks up to heaven in the gospels
it reminds me that he came from another world,
to teach us how to live in this world,
and lead us home to heaven.

I think every time Jesus looked up to heaven
it gave him strength and courage on earth
and helped him focus on his destination,

God the Father gave his most precious gift,
His Beloved Son into the world and then
God’s Son gives his life for the world,

so that we may have abundant life
on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Over and over the gospels show us how difficult
the chosen path of dying to self,
the way of the cross can be
as a way of life that leads to abundant and eternal life.

The rich young ruler asked Jesus what he needed to do
to inherit eternal life.

Jesus looked at him and loved him and then said
“Go and sell what you own and give to the poor and then follow me.”
And the young man walked away.

The disciples argued over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom

and which one would get to sit at a place of honor by Jesus' side.
Jesus told them they had to become humble like little children
to be exalted in the Kingdom.

“Who then can be saved?” they asked.

Dying to self is hard because it doesn't come naturally.
We are naturally inclined to hoard our possessions,
seek approval from people rather than God,
hold on to slights and grudges rather than forgive,
trust in our own plans instead of God's plans.

We're naturally inclined toward self-fulfillment and self-righteousness
not dying to self.

That's why the marketplace is flooded with all sorts of self-help gurus
and self-help techniques.
People know they need to change.
People want to change as long as it's on their own terms and timeframe
and by their own efforts.

But the idea of dying to self in order to make room for God
to change us from the inside out isn't consumer friendly.
There are no step-by-step directions.
The process takes a lifetime.
The results are sometimes hard to measure.

And we will usually try anything else instead.

The comic strip 'Calvin and Hobbes centers around a precocious boy
named Calvin and his trusty and wise friend Hobbes, the tiger.

In one comic strip, Calvin says to Hobbes:
'I feel bad that I called Susie names and hurt her feelings.'
With his head cast down, he continues:
'I'm sorry I did it.'

Hobbes says to him innocently with outstretched hands:
'Maybe you should apologize to her.'

Calvin thinks about it then as he walks away he says:
'I keep hoping there's a less obvious way.'

Usually we associate abundance with more of what we want
or think we need to be happy and successful.

But the key to abundant life that leads to eternal life is to
recognize God's activity, God's prompting, God's ways,
and then to let Him have His way in our life
trusting that His ways are better than our ways.

Remember the old Star Trek TV show?
Nichelle Nichols played Lt. Uhura in the original Star Trek TV program
and also the Star Trek movies.

She was one of the first Black women regularly featured on a weekly
TV series and she had obstacles to overcome.

A few studio executives were hostile toward her character and
sometimes they would order the script to be rewritten
to diminish her role.

The studio purposely withheld tons of her fan mail.
After one year on the program she was fed up.

She was also a very talented professional singer and dancer.
Nichols went to executive Producer Gene Roddenberry and
told him she was going to quit to pursue her performing career.

Before she quit she happened to meet Dr. Martin Luther King at a fundraiser
and he urged her not to leave the show because
she was a role model for many people.

She said, "When you have a man like Dr. King say you can't leave the show,
it's daunting. It humbled my heart, and I couldn't leave.
God had charged me with something more important than my
own career.

Not only did she become a fixture on Star Trek,
she actually influenced NASA, challenging them to hire Blacks
and women for their astronaut corps.

She led a recruitment drive that saw 1,600 women and 1,000 minorities apply within four months.

By giving up her plans to sing and dance,
and by enduring through what was a difficult situation
Nichols found the defining role of her career in one of the most popular TV shows ever.

Dr. King was an instrument of God in her life.
She had to die to self and her own plans and in the process found her God given destiny.

By dying to self she saw her life as part of something more important
and in the process received an abundant life far richer than the one she had hoped for.
She humbled herself and allowed God to have his way in her life
and God used her to be a channel of blessing to other people.

The process of dying to self in order to glorify God is a great challenge.
To live fully in the world without being of the world.

I think it's important to keep our eyes on the cross and our eyes on the prize like Jesus did.

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.
He knew where he was going and he knew why he was going.
He knew the road to Jerusalem would lead to Golgotha
and he went there for people like you and me.

Jesus also kept his eye on the prize.
Before he prayed, "Jesus looked up to heaven."

Like the psalms say: "I lift up my eyes to you, O God, enthroned in heaven.
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord the maker
of heaven and earth. (Psalms 121; 123).

Jesus looked up to heaven in order to see clearly on earth.
We can find the courage and strength and the will to die to self.
We know that it leads to abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Each sacrifice we make for Christ and the world leads us one step closer.