

Deny Yourself?

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would fall with fresh power upon us this morning as we now spend some time listening to what Jesus taught us. And Father, everything in the world and everything in our flesh and everything about the devil would say that what Jesus says is just wrong.

And Father, you know how hard it is for us to deny ourselves and pick up our cross and follow you. But we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do a wonderful work in each of our lives, that not only would we see the beauty and the wisdom of his words, but that we move forward in doing them.

That today and every day we will be more deeply convinced of the gospel and more deeply trusting and loving of Jesus, that we would be willing to deny ourselves and to take up our cross and to follow him.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, if I was to say, I have some really good news.

You know, one of my nephews has been out of work for a while and he just got a really, really great job. And the commissions are through the roof and his job is to sell Russian war bonds here in Ottawa.

[1 : 22] Russian war bonds, if you didn't hear that. So, if I said that, you'd all go, George, have you been smoking some of those no longer controlled substances that you can buy everywhere or doing some other type of thing?

That's just wrong. It's just evil. It's just wrong. And, in fact, actually, now that you've said it on YouTube Live, the police or CSIS will probably be checking up on this person to see if we can throw them in jail.

Or maybe they'll let him sell the bonds for a while so they can figure out who'd actually want to buy them and throw everybody in jail. But it would be something which is completely and utterly opposed to what Canadians believe, what Canadians value.

It's almost definitely illegal. And nobody would do it. Now, we have the exact same problem today with the words of Jesus. I don't know how many of you picked it up, but if you get your Bibles and you turn to verses, if you turn to verse 34, those of you who don't have your Bibles will be on the screen, but it's always good to follow along in your Bibles and maybe potentially make notes or other types of things that helps to bring the word more home to you.

But so remember the thing is about selling Russian war bonds, completely wrong. Nobody in Canada would like it. And if they do like it, they're suspect. They should probably be thrown in jail.

[2 : 43] I mean, that's how most Canadians would say. And just listen to what Jesus says in verse 34 again. And by the way, if you're watching this online, this is one of the problems that, I mean, it's going to be very offensive, what I'm about to read.

Sort of in an odd way, not offensive when the Bible talks about some of the things about money or sexuality, but offensive at a... See, here's the problem. Often people just go, oh yeah, yeah, it's religious stuff, yada, yada, yada, yada, yada, yada, and it doesn't really mean anything.

But no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Jesus means this. So Jesus means this. And that's why it's in this ancient biography recording the words of Jesus.

And listen to what it says in verse 34. And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, if anyone, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Let's say that again. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

[4 : 03] Now, frankly, to just about every Canadian, this is just wrong. In fact, actually, I think if people had the courage to say it to our eyes, they'd say, George, if you push this, if you push this, you need to deny yourself, you need to die yourself, you need to pick up your cross and follow Jesus, if you push this language of denying yourself, more trans people will commit suicide.

More wives and children will be abused. The poor will be kept poor. And the power will run roughshod over those who do not have power.

Everything that Jesus just said is wrong. Why is it wrong? Well, because what do we know is wisdom? You know what wisdom is? You be you. Not you deny you.

That's foolishness. That will lead to trans people committing suicide. What leads to wisdom is you be you. Only you can and must be you and do you.

No one else can do you. No one else can really speak into it. Only you know who you really are and you have to do you. And on top of that, mixed in with that is, you know what, when you're thinking of the holiday, when you're thinking of some quiet time, when you're thinking of your need to exercise, when you're thinking of your need to buy that handbag or that car or that boat, you know what, you deserve it.

[5 : 41] You deserve it. You've been working really, really hard and you deserve, you deserve that purse, you deserve those shoes, you deserve that car, you deserve it.

You deserve that time off. You deserve it. In fact, the matter is, George, that rather than telling people that they have to deny themselves and die to themselves, that they have to pick up and cross and follow me, what you should really be saying is not only you do you and you deserve these good things in life, you deserve those good things in life.

And since you deserve it, you have to grab those good things in life by your hands. And if you're having problems doing that, what you need to do is you need to grow in self-esteem. That's the way of wisdom.

More self-esteem. More learning that you are worth it. You're a good person. You deserve these things. You be you. That's what people need to hear.

For not, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

[6 : 47] And then, George, just listen to what he goes on to say. For what does it profit a man, verse 36, to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. We want to teach that you get both your soul and the world. That's the way of wisdom. You get your soul and the world. You get your life and you make your life.

And then in verse 38, for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, like how dare him refer to Canadian culture as adulterous and sinful? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father and the Holy Angels?

George, this is the big problem with religious people. This guy is a raging narcissist. And somehow or another, religion is all about raging narcissists, getting away with their raging narcissism and encouraging people to deny themselves and give up the good things.

Like, George, you shouldn't be telling people the wisdom of tithing. Like, what sense does it make to give away money? You should be talking about how to make more money, how to build self-esteem. Nothing in this text makes sense to most Canadians and most Canadian Christians, which is why we spiritualize it.

[8 : 16] So what do we do? Well, first of all, we have to acknowledge, we have to acknowledge that the average Canadian way of understanding these things, that there's a lot to say for it that's very good.

Like, I can speak very personally about this. I can tell you that my parents were very, very, very disappointed when I chose to become an Anglican minister. They wanted me to be an engineer and make good money.

I was good at math. It might be hard for some of you to believe, but I can figure things out occasionally and be practical like engineers can. And I had the aptitude for it.

I was good at school. I'd have the marks to get into an engineering school. I was going that direction when I changed for a variety of things. But they were very disappointed when, first of all, I wanted to become a minister.

And then to make matters worse, it was an Anglican minister. Because at least if I'd become a Baptist minister or an associated gospel minister, at least those are Christians. I mean, Anglicans aren't even Christians from their point of view back then.

[9 : 20] So it was just a terrible decision that I was making. And just to top it off, just one more example, they would never have picked Louise to be my wife. They did not approve. Now, just to be fair, I was maybe close to the bottom of the barrel.

Like Louise's parents definitely did not approve of me. They would never have picked either me or someone like me for their daughter. And Louise's status in the family dropped lots and lots and lots of steps by choosing to marry me.

So you know what? There's something to be said about the fact that one of the problems is that society or family, that people can be squeezing you into their molds. I mean, you know, basically Louise, my parents would never have picked Louise because at the time Louise was a Roman Catholic.

And Louise's family would never have picked me. I mean, they actually once said we were overheard for one of the family members saying to Louise's parents about the fact that she was marrying me, they said literally, it could be worse, he could be a Baptist.

So they definitely wouldn't have picked me, right? So sometimes, and you know, my parents desire, and my parents are immigrants and you know, they want their, they come to a country for opportunity and they want to see their kids make more money and all of that type of stuff.

[10 : 42] But you know, there is something to what Canadians say about the fact that, you know, family and culture and society can, people can want to live their lives through their children and there's all these, there's something to what Canadians say which we need to take seriously.

And if in fact what Jesus means is something which denies those things, then there is some problem with Jesus' teaching if we're honest. But what there is, what Canadians don't want to acknowledge is it's as if often in Canada there's these two types of conversations that go on and people never realize that they're actually working in conflict with each other.

That to pursue one means you won't get the other. It somehow feels as if they can get both and often when there's this particular thing that they really want, they double down, Canadians double down on this to try to get this.

And what are the two things? Well, most people, what most people in Canada want is they really would love, they want love. Like love is very important. When you see the slogan love is love, that resonates very deeply as it should with Canadians.

And it doesn't, they don't just want, most Canadians, most of us don't just want, like it's, romantic love of course is good, but a stable relationship to find another person that they could have a stable relationship with, to have a family that's not broken and divided and severed, to have friends that last, that these things are very, very important to Canadians.

[12 : 18] I, you know, I talked to some young people and it's, and probably some of you here who don't just have one dad, they have two or three dads. And I'm not talking, but a same-sex couple, I just mean their mom has been married two or three times and that's not counting boyfriends and they have stepchildren and stepbrothers and sisters and they're all not together.

And you can tell in talking that on one hand they deeply long that as they move forward they will have a partnership, a marriage that will last and that their family will last and that there will be something enduring because there is this deep hunger and desire for love.

But think about it for a second. You do you. You deserve it. self-esteem. You do you is in fact the attitude and slogan for entitlement.

Isn't it? And you deserve it. That's the language of entitlement. Entitlement ruins romantic love. Entitlement ruins marriages.

It ruins families. It ruins workplaces. It ruins friendships. You do you is the language of entitlement.

[13 : 42] Listen, you can't tell me to come home at a certain particular time because I gotta be me. I gotta be me. You can't tell me who I am.

I know who I am. I gotta do me. I gotta develop me. I deserve this. It is the language of entitlement and it's also the language of narcissism.

It's the language of narcissism. And this is what I mean. Like if you look even within Canadian literature and if you wanted I could find examples in movies. I could find things in newspapers.

On one hand the language is you do you, you do you, you do you. Work on your self-esteem. You deserve it. At the same time why do we have all these problems with narcissism? This person, this politician, this leader, this boss, this, you know, you're looking at your marriage and trying to give your advice to your friend and you just realize that the person that your friend is married to is a raging narcissist who feels completely and utterly and completely and utterly entitled and they're ruining the marriage, they're ruining the family, they're ruining their workplace and yet this person that we're complaining about when he's getting counseling they're saying you do you.

And we wonder why workplaces and politics and media and family and friendships are so impermanent and begin so beautifully and quickly become so toxic.

[15 : 14] We long for love and are committed to the belief of you do you which kills love. and we are often completely and utterly blind to this.

Friends, brothers and sisters, only the gospel can provide a way that you can really be yourself in a way which isn't entitled and which isn't narcissistic.

Only the gospel, only the words of Jesus. So let's look again at what Jesus says and let's begin by looking at the things just before it because if the things before it weren't there then I would agree with Canadians that you should disregard what Jesus says.

But look what goes on before it. If you turn in your Bibles to verse 27 and we looked at 27 to 30 last week, I'm just going to give you a very, and if you're interested more in understanding 27 to 30, you can look at last week's sermon.

But listen to what Jesus says just before this. And Jesus went with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and on the way he asked his disciples who do people say that I am?

[16 : 30] And they told him John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. And Jesus asked them and this is the beginning of the Christian life.

It's not the Christian life, it's the beginning of the Christian life. The beginning of the Christian life, if you're here as a seeker, if you're watching this and you're curious, the beginning of the Christian life is when Christ asked you, he's asking you right now, but who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, you are the Christ. And Jesus strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

And as I sort of tried to show in last week and develop, but basically what we have here is this moment of Holy Spirit-driven, birthed insight that all of these different threads of what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh and we call the Old Testament, all the Jewish threads of prophet and prophecy of king and dominion and proper authority of priests and being connected to God and all of the longings and the yearnings for deliverance, for redemption, for freedom, for being at one with God and at one with others and at one with the creation and all of these other mysteries and riddles that are posed in the Old Testament, that all of these separate disparate threads, in this one moment of illumination, Peter realized that they all actually point to and are weaving a picture of the person of Jesus who is the Christ.

He is where they all come to. And in this moment of illumination, Peter gets that. And in the language of it, the disciples get it.

[18 : 23] It's not Peter voices it and as he voices it, it's as if there's this collective illumination of yes. You know, we've seen him raise the dead, we've seen him heal the sick, we've seen him make matter out of nothing, we've seen him calm the storm, we've seen him stop the waves, we've seen him do all of these things, we've heard his teaching and yes, all of these different threads which nobody had ever put together into one is pointing to him, this man, right here, this man, Jesus, the Christ.

And if it just ended there, we would be in very comfortable territory. We would be fine. The language of longing, the language of yearning, the language of mystery, the language of riddle, the language of illumination, we'd be fine.

That's actually very good. It's very Canadian, it's very human, we'd all be fine with it. Ah, a moment of illumination for us to contemplate and meditate upon in those quiet moments, maybe with us having that glass of red wine at the end of the day or that cup of coffee in the middle of the morning or the cup of tea in the afternoon with the cookie and those moments of quiet illumination, that's very good.

But then Jesus does something that shocks Peter to the point that he is going to use the same language when sometimes in the Gospels Jesus rebukes a demon. The same language of rebuke is what comes on Peter's lips to speak to Jesus.

When Jesus says this, look what he says in verse 31, immediately after this moment of illumination. For Peter, he says in verse 31, and he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.

[20 : 14] And here, the version that we're using, some of you, I know there's some of you here who speak two languages, some three, I know of at least one person in the room who speaks four languages. And so you know that sometimes when you're translating from one language into another, to make it, the thing smooth, you need to smooth off some of the translation and that's what's being done here.

But there's a second must. And so here's, I'm going to read it again as it is in the original language. Verse 31, and he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and must be killed and after three days rise again.

Must, said twice, to bring home the emphasis. He must die. He must be rejected. He must suffer.

He must rise. This little sentence is profoundly important. And if we don't get the full force of the must, then the language that Jesus is going to use in a moment, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, makes no sense.

But when you understand the must, you understand the beauty and the wisdom of what Jesus is just inviting us to. You see, Christianity is the religion and the spirituality and the philosophy of love.

[21 : 40] no other philosophy, no other spirituality, no other religion. I don't mean to offend any Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim friends who might be watching this.

I don't mean to offend you. But just think about it. You need another to love. Whether it's romantic love where you need another, whether it's familial love where you need another, whether it's friendship love where you need a friend.

A person who says he loves his friends but has no friends isn't talking about anything that makes any sense. In fact, you'd think they're delusional. But you see, all of the religions and spiritualities of the world, they posit either that everything is God in some type of way but then where's the other?

Or they posit something like Allah but Allah is all by himself so how can Allah actually be a God of love? But only the Christian faith teaches us that before anything was created, before there was anything at all other than God from all eternity the Father has loved the Son and the Son has loved the Father and the Holy Spirit has loved the Father and the Son and the Son has loved the Holy Spirit and the Father and there has been this in a sense eternal dance of love, of giving and receiving, of true love, of all that is implied with love, of the desire for the best of the other, of affection, of delight, of the delight of giving and the delight of receiving and from all eternity there was love and so when God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit three persons one God when that God when he creates he does not create out of any need whatsoever he has no you see when you and I love we can't love purely and utterly I mean here's the thing if we're always just loving our family and we never get anything out of it at all at some point in time and I'm not just saying it has to always be a quid pro quo that you know for every every you know ten bits of love that we get we get ten bits back but if we get bit after bit after bit after bit after bit after bit after bit and there's never any response from the child or from the friend or from the husband or the wife or the beloved at some point in time we realize they are too entitled and too narcissistic and this love just isn't going to work because we understand that we still have some type of a need love but even at the same time that we have a need love for those who are the best of us the greatest of us you have this sense that probably the greatest type of love at all that could possibly be is a love that has no need that's pure gift pure giving that needs nothing in return and that only describes

God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit three persons one God and so that when God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit when God creates human beings it is pure gift pure giving pure grace God has no need of us no need to receive from us it is pure gift and it is this God who acts to create human beings and to save us and so the first must is a must of love love love must bestow love and deliverance upon those who are needy and the love that Jesus offers that the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit offers is a love towards us that has no need that's pure gift and grace and the love and the love that he and his death and his resurrection which flows out of love and actually just one more thing sorry before I move on to the next two things right and this is part of the mystery

[25 : 40] I pointed out occasionally as we've been going through the Gospel of Mark if you go back now and you read the Gospel of Mark and you just think about this this is part of the reason why it's such a shock to Peter to hear this and it's going to be a shock that even when it comes time for Jesus to get captured they don't actually believe that he's actually going to be captured he's actually going to be rejected he's actually going to die why?

how can a man who can heal a paralyzed man die? how can a person who can create fish and bread out of nothing how can he die? how can a person who can stop the wind by his mere word or thought how could he die?

how could a person who could take waves that are going like this higher than these posters and all of a sudden it goes flat how could he die? how could someone who raises the dead how could he die?

like how could he? they could stick spears up to a side of him all day he'll steer in he'll steer in he nails pop out wind to blow the soldiers away or just to levitate them away or just to annihilate them he can do all of that only pure love can hold him to the cross only pure love only pure love can hold him to the cross why else must he die?

we human beings the language of entitlement you know you do you you deserve this work on your self-esteem there is something bent in human beings that's out of shape and that bent is towards pride it's towards being a god or a goddess and we can't seem to fix that bent even amongst the most holiest of people who in the eastern religions who desire who've lost their desire in a sense they never really lose their desires because they still desire to get out of the cycle of birth and rebirth and to merge with the one like there's just and so Jesus lives the life that we could never live and he and it's the whole story of Jesus is the opposite of the bent of our life in the glory of the father and the holy spirit with his majesty and with his love and setting aside everything that makes him god except his very nature of god but all of the appearance all of that he sets it aside and he takes into himself our human nature and he's described as Emmanuel he walks amongst us he doesn't come as a king or as a brilliant athlete or a brilliant philosopher or a powerful person he comes to a conquered people and he comes to a lower working class existence and he lives a life without owning anything or any property and I can't because I'm on a mic I'm not mic like this

[28 : 50] I can't keep going down and down and down and down but he goes down further to being rejected he goes down further to being killed in the most shameful type of embarrassing way and the bible says he even tastes all there is to taste of death and it's as if the thing within us human beings which is bending us out of shape and bends us out of shape and the only way that we can begin to be truly reconciled to God and reconciled to each other is to begin to have that bend fixed and we can't live that life and so what we see in Jesus is the complete opposite to straighten us to heal us he lives the life that we cannot live ourselves and when we put our hands in the hands of Jesus when we follow him we're receiving from him the life that we could not live that we need to live to be straight and to be free and to live with God we receive that from him out of pure gift love and the fact of the matter is is that forgiveness always requires that the person to forgive bears a cost if in a over the next couple of months we invite somebody over to our house and somebody comes to our house and they do something they cause some damage to the wall maybe or they break something which is expensive they break our TVs we don't really have any expensive things but we'll pretend that we have something expensive an antique lamp or something like that and it's broken and the person that we've invited over it's somebody who has very very little money and so if we're going to forgive them we're still out that broken thing let's say it's a let's say it's a very expensive sound system five five ten thousand dollars

I have to be careful somebody say five thousand dollars not an expensive sound system like for me probably two hundred dollars is expensive because I'm cheap about that type of stuff you know but you know your ten thousand dollar sound system is broken well who's going to pay well if I forgive the other person I'm still out a ten thousand dollar sound system like I either have to live without it which still means the loss or I have to replace it which means I pay the price now the opposite of trying to forgive them is to pursue them to pursue them and pursue them pursue them to get that money back to require them to take a loan to get mad at them if we don't receive the payments or if it's something else if there's something that they've done that's not just material it's maybe they've done something to hurt my reputation they've said some lies about me or slandered me or done something which has hurt me maybe in the congregation or some other type of place or in my family or whatever and I have to either decide that I'm going to sort of just swallow the cost of this that I'm in a sense going to pay the price of this because

I want to be free or I need to try to get it from them and if I can't maybe get it from them then maybe I you know maybe what I have to do is I have to start telling bad things about them and I have to do bad things to them so they're belittled and they come down to my level so that we're equal and I can feel justified but the problem is when I do all of those things I'm becoming like them how do I not become like them and how do I be free and the only way to do that is often to absorb the cost yourself and that's what forgiveness is amongst other things and so that's what we see here on the cross that the debt that we justice properly says that we should pay and God the father God the son God the holy spirit seen our profound need and knowing that we could never pay it because they are pure gift love the cost of our forgiveness of our offenses is borne by

God himself and so that when we see Jesus dying upon the cross for us we see pure gift love in action and we see pure gift love that lives the life that we cannot live that is offered to us as a gift to clothe us and to stand for us and we see pure gift love which we can never pay paying that which we can never pay and not because God needs anything from you or me but just because God is love I began by saying about the Russian war bonds in light of all this let's listen again to what Jesus says in verse 34 in calling the crowd to him with his disciples that means you know what he wants people like you and me to come to him and follow him he summons us that's the language there's an urgency in the original language an urgency he's summoning you he's summoning me if anyone if anyone would come to come after me because that's what he wants let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake in the gospels will save it for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul for what can a man give in return for his soul for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of him will the son of man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels but it doesn't end with this it ends with and he said to them truly

I say to you there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power and he's not referring to the second coming he's referring to his death upon the cross and his resurrection they will see this they will see the resurrected Jesus they will see him death does not have the final word injustice and rejection and sin does not have the final word they will see him so what does it mean to deny himself in this context the best analogy that I can give is this and I don't think we have a young enough baby in the room but some of us who are parents and maybe you're not like me but this was what my wife and I were like you get these little tiny toddlers who can just barely stand you know they can just barely stand like this and you put them on the edge of a stair and they have a very healthy fear of stairs and you say jump to me and so at first for the little kids the distance you can't see this it might just be this far just this far and the little kid you know totters and looks down and looks around and everything within them says you don't get too far from vertical and jump they look down they look at their mom or their dad they look down they look at their mom and their dad they look around they look at their mom and their dad and then while they look at their mom and dad they do this and they jump and then after they've done it a little bit for this distance it can be this distance between this distance and before you know it if you're not careful you're going up the stairs and your kid jumps six feet and you hope you can catch them and they don't knock you down the stairs, but that's good. But you see, you don't tell the kid, go to the top of the stairs and jump.

[36 : 45] And that's what we hear when we hear these words of Jesus. Go to the top of stairs and jump. That's killing yourself. That's just denying everything about you and it's talking about your ruination. No, what is Jesus saying? Look at me. Pure love. Pure love. Live the life that you cannot live so that you can live, that paid the price you cannot pay so that you can live in me with me.

I am here. It is love calling. Jump. You know what the world's going to tell you? Yeah, don't give 10% of your money to the church and to the poor and to missions. That's foolishness.

Deny yourself, is Jesus saying, and trust me. Don't forgive. Fight. Jesus says, jump. Don't be generous.

Go into debt because you deserve it. Jesus says, don't listen to the world. This is love calling and love speaking. I want you to jump and trust me that I'll catch you.

And you'll have the wonder of the jump, that feeling of flying, and it ends with being caught in your father's arms. And so when you learn to stop, to listen to everything the world says and keep your eyes on Jesus and pick up your cross and follow him.

[38 : 19] Contrary to the advice of the world, there is a thrill, there is a beauty, and it ends in far more. And a kid jumping into the arms of his mom or his dad is not a kid demeaned, but a kid alive.

And secure and loved. And brothers and sisters and friends, this is what Jesus is calling you and me for today. Just want to end with a quote just to seal the whole deal.

If you could put the final quote up, it's famous words by Jim Elliott. Here's the thing. Hold on to money, you're going to lose all your money. Hold on to your looks, you're going to lose all your looks. Hold on to your life, you're going to lose all your life.

Hold on to your power, you're going to lose all your power. How do I know this? It is 100% guaranteed. What does Jim Elliott say, who died a martyr's death?

He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.

[39 : 26] If you're watching this and you have not given your life to Jesus, there's no better time right now.

In a sense, the Christian life begins with this jump. And it grows with learning to just being so trusting in the love and the eyes and the message of the gospel that more and more and more you are willing to deny yourself and to jump.

And so if you have not given your life to Christ, there's no better time now. He is calling you. Jump into his arms. I invite you to stand. Just bow our heads in prayer.

Father, in times like this and days like this, we realize that there are two parts within us. One part that says, I don't want to. Father, it's scary and it's hard. And another part that makes us realize that, in fact, this call of Jesus to himself, this call of love, is in fact the longing and the yearning of our hearts.

And that in him, we can be fully ourselves. And fulfilling that desire we have to be really and fully ourselves. In the thrill of the flying, in the thrill of the landing, in the new arms, your arms of love.

[40 : 55] The arms of our crucified Savior, who is love. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move and work deeply within us. In the context of our own lives. Father, whatever the specific thing is today that we feel that we must have, that we have to have, that we can't let go of, that, Father, that your Holy Spirit would bring before us those ways that, right today and these days this week, that we need to deny ourselves and to pick up our cross and to come following you.

And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that we follow Jesus because he's with us. He's with us. He doesn't go so far ahead to leave us behind. He helps us to carry the cross as we follow him.

And that we only know, Father, help us to know that we only know that when we embark with Jesus to follow him. And help us to keep our eyes on him, both as individuals and as a church.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. And all God's people said, Amen. Amen.