

Quick Backdrop

The Lenten Season is the “21-Day Fix” fitness surge for our souls. Or perhaps more accurately, the 40-Day Fix for our souls. Whether or not your faith tradition practices Lent, and whether or not you’ve heard of the recent “21 Day Fix” fitness rage, your soul can benefit from building muscle in the area of saying “no.” This is a vital exercise because, as Matthew 16:24 tells us, the most direct path to fulfillment in following Jesus is the path of saying “no” to ourselves.

1 Digging In (God, Show Me!)

As you read the verses below, note everything Jesus said about following him.



Matthew 16:24-27

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

2 Taking It Inward (God, Teach Me!)

Spend the next five minutes in solitude, pondering Jesus’ statement about denying ourselves. Write down, or enter into an e-doc, any thoughts that come to your mind.

We may be committed to following Christ and possibly even agreed to this verse to deny ourselves, yet we somehow still cling to things of our self: we want significance, we want influence, we desire popularity, we seek comfort.

Of course, we can’t “give up” our way into a relationship with Christ, as in achieve salvation through denial and sacrifice. Jesus did that for us. Our way to a relationship with Christ is to believe and accept what He did. But often, even without thinking, we “save” some of those things back for ourselves, we miss out on being a full-on disciple of Jesus.

What are you saving back for yourself? What are you holding onto that is more a part of this world than it is a part of God’s world?

Fold or Cut

3 Putting Into Practice (God, Change Me!)

Some faith traditions do not practice the Lent Season. Whether yours does or does not, your soul can benefit from your building muscle in the area of saying “no.”

Some things to ponder:

- Do you desire to follow (“come after”) Jesus in the most fulfilling way?
- Where do you most need to build your “no” muscle? Where are your weak spots?
- List 2-3 desires you can say “no” to today. These can be innocent desires (your favorite chocolate or go-to snack) or more destructive desires (lust, temper). They key: start saying “no.”

Finally, look over your responses to “Taking It Inward” above. How can you put into practice your thoughts on Jesus’ words in Matthew 16?