

Trust Completed in Death to Self

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For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

- *Matthew 16:25–26*

For faith to serve as a channel of God’s provision to our needs, two more conditions are necessary: the first has to do with our relationship to ourselves, and the second with our relationship to others. The latter, which will be discussed in upcoming devotionals, may not surprise you, for it involves the central Christian virtue of love, though how it relates to our experience of God’s sufficiency may be new to you. But first we will look at how the very important concept of death to self directs us toward a life without lack.

In a day and age in which we hear far too much about self-fulfillment and self-promotion, this topic may not sound inviting. So it is essential at the start to notice that we are dealing with “death to self” not “death of self.” The distinction between these prepositions is vital to maintain. Death to self is not ultimately a negation, but a rising up into the very life of God (2 Peter 1:4). Thus our lives are saved by his life (Rom. 5:10). This is essential.

One problem that has hindered this teaching in the past is that those presenting it have not carefully drawn the distinction between death to and death of self. As a result, people view death to self as if it means getting rid of yourself. That is not at all what it involves. You were not put here on earth to get rid of yourself. You were put here to be a self, and to live fully as a self. The worth of the self—your self—is inestimable, and God’s intent for you is that you become a fully realized self as you make the grace-fueled movement from the old self to the new (Col. 3:9–10).

Some of Jesus’ teachings might lead you to think otherwise. Take Matthew 16:24, for example: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” What does it mean for someone to “deny himself”? We must be very careful how we understand this kind of teaching, especially remembering that God’s adversary, Satan, works to confuse and misdirect our minds. Does denying your self mean denying that you exist? Of course not. Does it mean that we should consider ourselves as worthless? This hardly makes sense, given what Christ went through to save us. So what does it mean? One clue is found in the paradoxical character of what Jesus goes on to say in the passage above (Matthew 16:25-26).

In the original language, the word translated as “soul” is also translated as “life” in various other passages. This is because the soul encompasses and organizes the whole person, it interrelates the various dimensions of the self to one another. So, both terms, the “soul” and “life” take us back to the self. Jesus clearly states that if you try to save your own life you will lose your soul.

REFLECT

With this statement, Jesus is speaking to a common human condition, the feeling that you have exchanged your soul—your self—for something far less valuable. It is a real danger that we all face. You may have met people who say, “I have lost my life” or “my life is over” because they have pursued the wrong things.



How does that work? How does a person lose her soul? Can you think of a time when you felt as if you exchanged your soul for something far less valuable?

Note: The devotional content has been made available through a partnership with [Dallas Willard Ministries](#).



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