

Getting to the end of Ourselves: Dying to Live

This lesson today marks the 10th and final lesson in a series about getting to the end of ourselves. After the introductory lesson the next four lessons were focused on four beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. We discussed the concepts of:

- Being broken to be whole (poor in spirit)
- Mourning to be happy
- Being humbled to be exalted (meek shall inherit the earth)
- Being authentic to be accepted (pure in heart shall see God)

Those lessons were intended to help us see **that true blessings & true fulfillment is found at the end of ourselves**. And when we follow the teaching of Jesus our **lives are often countercultural & counterintuitive**.

-opposite of the world & opposite of how we often think

The last five lessons in this series were intended to help us see that when we get to the end of ourselves and finally realize **we aren't strong enough, smart enough, or talented enough, then we are in the best position to be used by God in significant ways**. We discussed the concepts of:

- Being empty to be filled (jars, better to be filled than full)
- Being helpless to be empowered (self-reliance of men, lame man at the pool)
- Disqualified to be Chosen
- Weak to be Strong

So, one last time let's think about a way we can get to the end of ourselves so that our lives better reflect the glory of God.

I want to begin with a story about a young man we all know. At the time of this story he was a 4-5 yr old boy in a Bible class that Eva was teaching. When Eva posed the question, "How do we get to Heaven?", she was hoping for answers like "do what God says". Instead the young boy answered with a bit of a sigh and no hesitation, "You gotta die first!" That young boy was Malik Allahham.

It was a brilliant answer. Shall I say he was **"dead on"**!

Of course, Malik was speaking of the physical death necessary for all to pass from this life into eternal life. But the Scriptures teach of another death each one of us must die—a **dying to oneself**. This lesson is about recognizing that getting to the end of ourselves means dying in order to live.

To help make the point of the lesson let me tell you about the “Fenn Treasure”.

Forrest Fenn was a pilot for the [United States Air Force](#) with the rank of Major and was awarded the [Silver Star](#) for his service in the [Vietnam War](#), where he flew 328 missions.^[6] After retiring from the [United States Air Force](#), he and Rex Arrowsmith, who taught Fenn the business of art, operated the Arrowsmith-Fenn Gallery, which later became the Fenn Galleries that he operated with his wife, Peggy.^{[6][7]} The gallery, ~~which he began by purchasing sculptures from struggling artists and casting bronzes of them, was located in [Santa Fe, New Mexico](#) and sold everything from artifacts to fine art, openly selling forgeries of [Modigliani](#), [Monet](#), [Degas](#), and other artists.^[8] It was eventually sold to Nedra Matteucci.^[9] In 1988, Fenn was diagnosed with cancer and came up with the idea during this illness to hide a chest full of treasure for anyone to go find. He filled the chest with "treasure" containing gold nuggets, rare coins, jewelry and gemstones, along with an olive jar holding his autobiography. He intended to hide it and end his life nearby, with the treasure as a legacy.^[10] However, he survived his illness and waited until he was 79 or 80 to hide the treasure. (@2010)~~

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenn_treasure

Fenn provided an unusual map to help people find the treasure: ~~The following~~ **poem is found in the book *The Thrill of the Chase* by Forrest Fenn...is said to contain nine clues, and upon complete understanding, will lead a person to a bronze treasure chest filled with over a million dollars worth of treasure. This chest of riches has been placed ‘somewhere in the Rocky mountains north of Santa Fe, New Mexico’ for anyone to find! Although the meaning of the poem is believed to guide someone to the hidden treasure, the book is said to hold ‘subtle clues’ to help one with their quest. Many treasure hunters, who are actively pursuing the ‘title to the gold’, have also purchased *The Thrill of the Chase* book from *Collected Works*.**

Four people are known to have died while searching for the treasure. New Mexico police have tried to pressure Fenn into ending the hunt.^[13]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenn_treasure

His challenge has inspired thousands of people to go in quest of his hidden treasure, which, so far, has not been found. Every now and then he publishes a new clue based on undesired developments.

Additional clues:

“The Treasure is hidden higher than 5000 feet above sea level.”

“No need to dig up the old outhouses, the treasure is not associated with any structure.”

“The treasure is not in a graveyard.”

“The treasure is not hidden in Idaho or Utah.”

<http://mysteriouswritings.com/the-thrill-of-the-chase-poem-by-forrest-fenn/>

By burying the treasure, he was trying to convey to people that anything truly worth having must be pursued. The best stuff in life is buried. You have to go after it. You have to figure out where to dig, and then you have to go lay claim to it.

There are some obvious parallels to the spiritual treasure spoken of in the Scriptures.

- God speaks of having a storehouse full of blessings (Mal.3:10)
- These spiritual blessings are “hidden” for anyone to find (Eph.3:1-9)

By “hidden” I don’t mean to convey that God wants some to find it and not others. The Scriptures are clear that God desires for all men to be saved (1Tim2:4)

But you cannot accidentally find the treasure of God. You must have eyes that see and ears that hear. You must pursue it deliberately, using the map that God has provided in His divine revelation.

The Bible says that life’s real prize is hidden, and you have to know where to search.

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Col.3:3

Paul says to live you have to die first. In a gospel filled with paradoxes, this is the ultimate one. The end of self is where real life begins. And Jesus says that once I die, I can truly live.

Notice the words of Jesus as He ended the greatest sermon of all time by talking about two different paths –one leading to life & the other to destruction.

-Matt. 7:13-14

You can call it the first clue on the map Jesus leaves us –**look for a narrow gate**. It won't be fancy or nicely decorated. This gate is the kind most people ignore. And when you walk through it you can expect a tough path. It crosses through death, but leads to life. As Dietrich Bonhoffer put it, "when Christ calls someone, he bids them come and die".

Death is nobody's favorite word. This is seen in how we tiptoe around it by using nicer names.

- Someone passed on
- They've gone ahead
- They crossed the river
- They got their wings

And if polite euphemisms aren't our thing, we try to use more light-hearted terms:

- Kicked the bucket
- bought the farm
- pushing up daisies
- croaked

We either oversoften death or we make it into a joke, but beyond this we do everything we can to live in denial of the reality of death. Even so, Jesus urges us to die. Not a physical death, of course, but to die to ourselves.

This is countercultural because our culture is all about celebrating self, finding more life for self. For most of us, we start out life heading down the road of living for self instead of dying to self. And after spending years on the wrong road it is difficult to admit we've made the wrong choice. We're too invested in self.

So, how to we die to ourselves?

This series of lessons has been like a treasure hunt, if you will, where we've been following Jesus through His teachings. We've seen how He turns the world's views

inside out and upside down. His teaching goes against the grain of how we typically think, and we realize that to follow Jesus **we must retrain our minds to see things through a different lens**. The key to thinking this way is a willingness to give up old ways, which never would have worked anyway.

Nobody is saying this is easy. The disciples found it difficult too. It is hard to break free from a lifetime of teaching and training. The journey to the end of self requires a completely different way of looking at this world.

For the disciples, it ultimately came down to a question of life versus death. They had to decide if they were going to live for themselves or die to themselves. It's the same choice Jesus asks of us.

Matt.16:24-26

The map leading to the treasure offered by Jesus offers some challenging clues:

- Deny yourself
- Pick up your cross
- Follow Him
- Prepare to die

Not the most enticing travel plan is it? But that is the reason the treasure is so elusive and so few seek it. The great paradox is that **dying to self leads to the one true life**.

All through the gospels, Jesus offers His life as an example of His teaching. One of the most striking examples of getting to the end of ourselves is recorded in **Jn 13**.

In this narrative, we are able to open the door into the upper room where Jesus sits with His 12 disciples. It was only recently that these disciples argued among themselves about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Three years down the path with Jesus, and they still fail to understand the central idea Jesus had been showing them.

On this occasion, Jesus doesn't lecture them. Instead, He does something much more powerful when He picks up a towel and begins to wash their feet. Again,

this was countercultural. It wasn't normal for an influential rabbi to humble himself and wash another man's feet.

John also tells us that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God (Jn.13:3).

Perhaps this means that Jesus fully understood His divine identity. He knew He was God, and He knew that all power in heaven and earth was His to command. And with this understanding He **allowed Himself** to be betrayed, beaten, mocked, falsely accused, and crucified.

It is mind-blowing as we step inside the room to see Jesus surrounded by 12 men he loves and has taught for 3 years, and who will now abandon Him at the first sign of danger.

- Judas will sell Him out for a few coins
- Peter will deny any knowledge of knowing Him after declaring He was the Son of God
- Only John & a few women follow Him to His execution

Jesus knew all of this would happen, and still, He took a towel and washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus was at the end of His ministry, the end of His earthly life, but He knew He was at the beginning of something that changed everything.

At the end of death and suffering and sacrifice comes the beginning of resurrection. Jesus washed feet at the very moment when He might have been caught up in His own problems! It is inherently human to focus on ourselves. It's how we are. Jesus teaches us to deny ourselves, to die to ourselves.

When He finishes washing the disciples' feet, He tells them that they should wash one another's feet (Jn.13:14). The verb for **wash** indicates ongoing and continual action. Jesus isn't saying to do this as an exercise today. He's saying do it from now on. He calls on them to come to the end of themselves every day and in every relationship.

If this was a one-time act, maybe it wouldn't be so difficult. But dying to self is a repetitive act. Each day we climb out of bed to begin a new day, we're still

human. The old self gets out of bed with us, and we have to put on Christ by **choice** day and day.

Each day is a new narrow gate. We have to make the choice over and over again, and it involves every aspect of our lives.

The paradox, of course, is that Jesus says that death leads to life. We ask, how can that be? **We can learn what it means only by doing what it demands.** When we come to the end of ourselves, and when we deny ourselves, we begin to feel freedom from the bondage of self-absorption.

You can keep living life the old way, trying to climb, trying to possess, trying to gain. But Jesus will ask you this question:

“For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?... **Matt.16:26**

In other words, what if you actually catch what you’re chasing?

What if you get the ultimate salary?

What if you get the ultimate house or tract of land?

What if you get the ultimate car, truck, boat?

What if the buried treasure is an empty box?

What if you realize you’ve lost your soul somewhere in the relentless pursuit?

I want to challenge you to look around at home, at work, in your community –and **find ways to pick up the towel and wash some feet.** Dying to ourselves is meant to be a daily decision AND a daily demonstration.

It is to be a way of life that influences every day of our lives. It is God’s way of ushering in His kingdom in places of darkness. This is the death we must die. Not a one-time death. It is a daily dying.

Have you followed Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection by dying to self and the world, and being buried with Christ in baptism so that He can raise you to walk in a new life?

(This series based on book “The End of Me”, by Kyle Idleman)