

Self-Denial

Saying no to self to say a bigger yes to Jesus

LISTEN & WATCH www.BTLdiscipleship.guide/self-denial [QR code]

BIG IDEA	Self-denial isn't self-hatred. It's saying no to the rule of the self so we can say a bigger yes to Jesus, and find real life.
MEMORY VERSE	"If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." Luke 9:23
ACTION STEP	Choose one small daily "no" and keep it all seven days, praying "Jesus, You are Lord" each time you feel the pull.
OUTCOME	I've practiced a daily "no" and surrendered one area of my life to Jesus.

The Way of Jesus Read before you meet • about 5 minutes

The most countercultural sentence

Our culture preaches a simple creed: *Follow your heart. You do you. You deserve it.* Jesus says something that sounds almost offensive to modern ears: "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Then He explains why: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). Self-denial isn't about losing your life. It's about finding it.

Not self-hatred, but self-surrender

Self-denial doesn't mean you don't matter, or that all your desires are bad. God made you, loves you, and delights in you. But our desires have been bent. Left on the throne, the self is a demanding little ruler: *I want. I need. I deserve. Right now.*

Jesus showed us the other way in the garden of Gethsemane. Facing the cross, He prayed, "Yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). That is the heart of self-denial: handing Jesus the throne, one decision at a time.

Training, not just trying

Paul compares the Christian life to an athlete in training (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). An athlete doesn't just try harder on game day. She trains every day in small ways so she's ready when it counts. Small daily "no's" (to the snooze button, the extra scroll, the last word in an argument) train our hearts to say yes to God when the big moments come. **Every small no is practice for a bigger yes.**

"Daily" and "follow Me"

Notice two words. *Daily*: taking up the cross isn't a one-time heroic act; it's an everyday choice. And *follow Me*: we never carry the cross alone. We follow the One who carried His first.

When You Meet about 60 minutes

Who leads: The discipler leads and models.

Connect · 10 min

- What's one thing you find really hard to say no to? (The snooze button, dessert, your phone, having the last word, a purchase...)
- How did sharing your story go? Did you ask anyone how their day was going?

Read · 20–25 min

Read aloud: Luke 9:18–25 and Luke 22:39–46

1. Right after Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, Jesus talks about the cross. Why do you think He connects the two?
2. What three things does Jesus ask of a follower (9:23)? What does the word “daily” add?
3. In Gethsemane, what did it cost Jesus to pray, “Not My will, but Yours”?
4. Where is your will most on the throne right now: your schedule, money, relationships, reputation, comfort, or future?

Practice · 15 min

- **The Surrender Prayer.** Each person write down one area from question 4. Hold the paper in an open hand and pray together: *“Jesus, this is Yours. Not my will, but Yours be done.”*
- **Choose your daily “no.”** Some ideas: no phone for the first 30 minutes of the day; no complaining; no second helpings or dessert; let someone else have the last word; no online shopping; get up at the first alarm.

Pray & Plan · 10 min

- Pray for each other's surrendered area by name.
- Confirm your daily “no” for the week.

For disciplers: Share your own daily “no” and how it's going. Your honesty about failing and starting again will help more than any teaching.

For groups: Invite volunteers to share their daily “no” so the group can pray and cheer each other on during the week.

Live It This week's action step

Choose one small daily “no” and keep it all seven days. Each time you feel the pull, pause and pray: “Jesus, You are Lord.”

My daily “no” _____

When I feel the pull, I will _____

Go deeper (optional): Choose one secret act of self-denial that no one else will ever know about (Matthew 6:3–4).

Pass It On within 48 hours

Tell someone what you’re saying no to this week and why, and what you’re learning about freedom.

Five Days with Jesus 10–15 minutes a day

Use **R³** each day: Read, Reflect, Respond.

☐ **Day 1 • Luke 9:23–25**

What does “deny myself” look like in my real schedule today?

☐ **Day 2 • Luke 22:39–46**

Pray Jesus’ prayer, “Not my will, but Yours,” about one specific situation.

☐ **Day 3 • Galatians 2:20**

If Christ lives in me, what changes about today’s choices?

☐ **Day 4 • Romans 12:1–2**

What would it mean to offer my body as a “living sacrifice” this week?

☐ **Day 5 • 1 Corinthians 9:24–27**

What is one small way I can “train” today?

Awareness: Notice the Pull

When you feel “I want, I need, I deserve, right now” rising up, don’t just obey it or fight it. Name it: “*That’s my self asking for the throne.*” Then pray, “*Jesus, You are Lord.*” Pay attention to what you reach for when you’re tired, bored, or stressed.

Ready to Move On?

- ☐ I kept my daily “no” most days and talked about what I noticed.
- ☐ I’ve surrendered one specific area of my life to Jesus.
- ☐ I can explain why self-denial leads to freedom, not misery.

When you and your discipler agree these are true, move on to the next session. If not, take another week. That’s growth too.

Sources & Acknowledgment

The original pathway

This booklet adapts and substantially rewrites material from *Discipleship Pathway* (2024) by Rev. Megan Koch and Rev. Phil Wiseman of Table Church in Des Moines, Iowa, used with the authors' blessing. The original identifies its license as Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

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The Colonial adaptation

Prepared for Colonial Presbyterian Church by Pastor Jeff Sparks for the Be the L.I.G.H.T. Discipleship Pathway. This adaptation keeps the original ten lesson themes; adds a Launch session with a gospel foundation and a Commissioning session with a multiplication plan; restructures each lesson around a weekly meeting, one action step, and a five-day reading plan; and draws on Colonial's *Be the LIGHT Abide Guide* (P.R.A.Y., R³, BLESS, and the Abide Plan), earlier micro-course drafts, and Kent Mathews' evangelism training at Colonial (listening, validating, clarifying, and "know, tell, do, and be the story").

Also informed by

Zúme Training (the Model, Assist, Watch, Leave pattern and the emphasis on obeying and sharing between sessions); *Rooted* by Mariners Church (short daily readings and shared experiences); and *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer (one practice at a time, and a rule of life).

Quotations

John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies* (2021). Dallas Willard, on "pitching its message too low." Henri Nouwen, on downward mobility. Robert Louis Stevenson (attributed), on seeds and harvest. The *Didache* (early Christian teaching, 1st–2nd century), on weekly fasting.

Scripture

Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), which is in the public domain. Read the full passages in any trustworthy translation or audio Bible.

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