

Closer to God: The Real Reason for Lent

Small Group Discussion Guide, week of Feb 21st

FEB 21ST SERMON SUMMARY

HOW WILL I RETURN TO GOD? Mark 8:34-37

Lent is a good time to reflect on how we have gotten away from God, and to return to living for Him. Jesus challenged his disciples to give up whatever gets in the way of living for Him because He is worth it.

1. The call to Self-denial (Mk. 8:34). Jesus calls his disciples to *deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him*. We can seek to set aside self and the desire to get what we want, and to daily choose His way, not ours.

2. The explanation of Value (Mk. 8:35-37). Jesus challenges us to consider what's valuable and what will be gained by living for Him - peace, wholeness, soul-deep satisfaction and surpassing joy. Disciples live for Jesus because it's worth it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION: The "top ten" items given up on Twitter in 2015 were: school, chocolate, twitter, alcohol, social networking, swearing, soda, sweets, fast food, coffee. Which of those would be hard for you to give up?

II. THINK AND REFLECT.

1. Think about the concept of self-denial in Romans 12:1-2 (below).

Romans 12:1-2: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

a. How do these verses call us to *deny ourselves*? Explain what you think it means.

b. Why is this valuable, and worth it?

2. Think about the concept of self-denial as you read Romans 12:9-19 (below):

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

- a. What title would you give this section of Romans 12?
- b. What do you think are the main ideas? Suggest a main ideas (or 2) for each sub-section:
 - v. 9-13
 - v. 14-16
 - v. 17-19
- c. How do you see the concept of self-denial in these verses? Give some examples of how we are to deny ourselves and give up what we want, for what God wants.
- d. Why are these things hard and/or painful to do?

3a. Choose one or more commands in Ro. 12, and talk about how they would help us grow in our relationship with **God**. Be specific.

b. Choose one or more commands, and talk about how they would help us in our relationships with **people**. Be specific.

c. What prevents us from following the commands (like these) that we see in Scripture?

d. How would a person who actually followed these commands feel? What would be different in his/her life?

III. PERSONAL APPLICATION (Choose 1 of the following if time is limited)

4a. Share about one of the following:

- something you have denied yourself or given up, and how it affected you
- something you feel you should give up, and how you expect it will affect you

b. What greater gain or value do you see in giving it up?

5. Read these “Reflection” questions, which Donna read in Sunday’s message. If any of them resonates with you, share your response.

LENT: Where are the places in your own life where you feel distant from God?
What has distracted you from cultivating your relationship with God more intentionally?
Begin your Lenten journey by saying something honest to God and reflecting on what you might “give up” or rearrange in order to create more space and passion for this most important relationship.

SELF-DENIAL:

What activities, behaviors, and relationships are most distracting to my spiritual life these days?
Which ones keep me from seeking God with all my heart?

During this Lenten season, what do I need to fast *from* in order to focus more fully on heavenly things?
- From *Lent: A Season of Returning* by Ruth Haley Barton

6. How is God speaking to you through this discussion or Sunday’s message?

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