

# GOD'S CALL

## Major themes in the Scriptures

### Quality of being (15)

#### The path to quality of being

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, "Quality of being", the fifteenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

At the heart of sin is the choice to go our own way instead of God's way of righteousness. If we want to develop well, we must learn deeply to deny ourselves effectively and become what we ought to be.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

A central teaching in the Scriptures is the primary importance of quality of our being. So, we want to know how we can effectively develop quality of being.

Quality of being concentrates on what is good and right, and it is centred in the being of God. God being absolutely morally perfect, if we learn to concentrate on God, to appreciate who He is, how He conducts Himself, what is in His heart, we will come to see more and more clearly what is truly good and how we can develop our lives.

If we do not sufficiently concentrate on what is good and pleasing in the eyes of God, the alternative is to concentrate on ourselves, what we like, what we prefer, what will be advantageous to us. And this very readily leads to a spirit of competition, wanting to be better than others, not really concerned about what happens to others as long as we get what we want. That kind of competition can easily lead to death and destruction in our being, to very negative consequences.

So God tells us what He wants of our lives. There are many instructions in the Scriptures. There are many aspects that God has made available for us to ponder over, to understand what He wants of us, but the central aspect of what He has communicated is very simple: He wants us to be good.

**Micah 6: 6-8**

- 6 With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high?  
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves?
- 7 Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
- 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

In these few verses, the Lord tells us many important underlying foundational principles. “With what shall I come to the LORD”: What is it that will bring joy to God? What would He be pleased with? What is really important to Him? Do we love Him? Do we want to come to the Lord in a manner that is truly pleasing to Him?

“Shall I come to Him... *And* bow myself before Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves?” Is this what God delights in? If they were to offer to Him yearling calves, burnt offerings – which He prescribed in the Old Testament for the Jewish people – if they were to do that, would God be pleased? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? – Would God be pleased with that?

The answer may be: Yes. If this is done with the right spirit, if this arises from a true heart of worship, if it is because we love Him, and we obey Him, and keep His commandments, then such an offering would be pleasing to God. If the Jewish people were to do this because they love God, because they obey Him, then it would be pleasing to Him.

But the context asks this question: “Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” This aspect tells us that there are many people who want to offer to God with the wrong spirit: They substitute the true with the false; they substitute the true inward meaning for the outward forms of things.

“Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts” – Can we live a life in which in our hearts, we are actually rebelling against God and going our own way and yet outwardly, we present something in the visible form that seems to be a dedication to God?

“The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul” – Can our outward acts, however good they may appear to be, can they replace the meaning in our heart – the sin of my soul?

The answer is: No. We can never please God just by outward things that we do. Whatever we do has to arise from meaning and quality in the heart.

And so he says: “He has told you, O man...” He has told you, O man – whoever you are. Man, wherever we are, throughout all the ages, in whatever setting – this applies.

“He has told you, O man, what is good” – What is good, this is what God wants. It does not matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, whether you are slave or free, whatever culture you are from, however young or old you may be, it applies.

“And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?”

This tells us that the primary aspects have to do with the quality of our hearts: Loving justice, kindness, walking humbly with our God has to do with moral values in our hearts that we hold, what is truly good, and then expressed in our relationship with other people and with God.

We do justice towards other people – we do not take advantage of them, we are not unfair to them, we are not cruel to them. We do justice. We love kindness not necessarily because we have to do something, because we owe them something. We love kindness: We show kindness for the well-being of others, loving others for their good. And we learn to walk humbly with our God: We learn to listen to Him, to submit to His ways, to be identified with what is important to Him; we are conscious that our life should fully belong to Him.

This is what we ought to concentrate on; this is what we should seek for in our lives. It is central and that is the direction.

So we must concentrate on developing moral qualities that will be good for all, and not natural abilities that help us to be better than others.

Many people, including Christians, living in this world, spend much of the time and energy concentrating on developing natural abilities with the desire to be better than others, so that we can be recognized, we can be praised, we can hold a higher position, we can command respect. So much is done because of that.

Of course, there is a place to develop our abilities so that we can contribute to the well-being of others, so that we can do the things of God effectively. But that is often not the case.

Our natural abilities should be developed for the purpose of doing what is morally helpful in the kingdom of God. That must be our motivation. It is only with that motivation that the development of our abilities becomes meaningful and good. So it must come from our hearts, the quality and the meaning in us.

So, qualities such as compassion, kindness and love must be central in our pursuits in life and this must be sustained, nurtured with determination, perseverance, courage and commitment, whatever the situation may be. This applies to all circumstances of life.

We can all appreciate that this is the right direction, emphasis, concentration.

However, in the realities of life, as we seek to live this way, we will come to realize it is not so easy to do that. We will find that though we want to be good, we have wrong desires within us. Though we want to be kind, in reality, we are often unkind. Though we want to honour God, in many ways, we dishonour Him. We strive, we struggle, we try to live out what ought to be, but we find that it does not seem to work. And this can go on year after year and we can become very discouraged.

We need to recognize that although our concentration should be on what is good and pleasing to God, and we should concentrate on God and what is meaningful to Him, we must see that there is a hindering problem within us that needs to be dealt with, and if we do not deal with that, our striving to concentrate on God and to please Him will fail again and again.

The self-life within us is very deep-seated and very difficult to deal with fully. This is a problem throughout the ages and all mankind have tasted of it and recognized it.

It is so easy to go our own way; it is so easy to concentrate on ourselves and what is advantageous to us and what we like and what we enjoy.

Unless we see this and we want to deal with it, we will not succeed in coming close to God, knowing Him, loving Him and developing.

We all know that faith in God is a primary aspect for the Christian. We must have faith in God, and faith means we concentrate on God and on what is good and what is pleasing to Him. So we should exercise faith in that direction, we should concentrate on that.

However, when we read the Scriptures, we see that the Scriptures often refer to repentance in relation to faith.

While there is an emphasis on faith, we often do not properly appreciate what is true faith. In order to understand true faith, we need to appreciate the importance of repentance because meaningful faith can come about only when there is deep repentance, which concentrates on the need to deal with ourselves deeply, if we want to follow the Lord fully.

So while it is good we should emphasize faith in God, coming to Him, believing in Him, trusting Him, obeying Him – it is good – but we need to recognize, without the proper emphasis on repentance and dealing with our self-life, that faith can readily become dead, artificial, superficial, unworkable; it is just an idea and not a reality.

This was the emphasis of the Lord Jesus when He preached the gospel.

**Mark 1: 14-15**

- 14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,  
15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The Lord Jesus was preaching the gospel of God and He said, "...repent and believe in the gospel."

There are many people today who preach the gospel or witness and share with unbelievers: "Believe in the gospel. The Lord Jesus died for you on the cross. Receive Him as your Saviour, you will be forgiven, you will be saved." Is that true? Yes, it is true. It is true that the Lord Jesus died on the cross. If you believe in Him, you will be forgiven, you will be saved. But that is true only when there is genuine repentance. Without repentance, we cannot properly believe in the gospel.

And so the Lord Jesus said, "repent and believe in the gospel." There are many people who want to believe in the gospel in an easy manner: "If I believe in the Lord Jesus, if I pray and I accept Him as my Saviour, then I will be forgiven, I will go to heaven." Is that true? It depends. If there is no genuine repentance, then it will not be true. Even if you pray many times to receive the Lord Jesus, you will not be saved; He will not be your Saviour.

But if there is genuine repentance and you come to Him wanting to change your lives in order to become what you ought to be, to discard all that you know that is wrong, and you seek to obey Him, trust Him, then yes, you will receive forgiveness, He will be your Saviour and you can develop from there.

We see this was also the emphasis of the apostle Paul in his ministry. The apostle Paul described the whole emphasis of his life in his ministry when he spoke to the elders of the church in Ephesus:

**Acts 20: 17-21**

- 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.
- 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,
- 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;
- 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,
- 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul was counselling the elders in Ephesus, in the church in Ephesus, and he shared with them how he laboured so hard, with all humility and with tears and with trials. He ministered, he preached, he laboured; he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable. He taught them publicly and from house to house. This is a description of the intense effort, the determination to bring the gospel to as many as possible.

But what was at the heart of it? What was he seeking to do? He said, "...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ": repentance first, and then faith.

We are not able to properly exercise faith in the Lord Jesus if we are unrepentant.

If we still want to go our own way and we want to come to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to be our Saviour, what kind of Saviour will we expect Him to be? It will be just like the Jews who ate of the bread and they wanted more of material things that the Lord Jesus could give to them.

How many people come to the Lord Jesus because they want more of the things of this world, more of the things that they could enjoy if they were to come to Him! They face problems and difficulties; they want someone who can solve the problems for them. They feel depressed; they want someone who can comfort them. But they still want to pursue their own desires and ambitions.

Repentance toward God means we change our direction: Instead of pursuing our own goals, our own ambitions, our own desires, following the ways of the world, we now turn to God, we give up the old way of life, we seek to understand what is it that is meaningful to God. We turn to Him. And when we turn to Him, it means we want to know what is meaningful to Him, what is the right path, what does He want of our lives.

The apostle Paul, before he was converted, he thought he knew how to live his life. He was persecuting the church; he thought he was serving God. But when the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to him and helped him to recognize that He is the Saviour of the world, the apostle Paul repented.

He changed his whole direction. Instead of persecuting the Christians and the church, he now acknowledged the Lord Jesus as his Lord and he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" He was no longer seeking to go his own way, to do the things he thought were good. He asked the Lord: "What do You want me to do?"

This direction, this attitude is very important in the path of faith in true repentance. Are we willing to seek the Lord to understand what is it that He wants of us?

And so we see the apostle Paul changed from a persecutor of the church to the apostle to the Gentiles, a champion for the church. He stood on behalf of the Christians and because of that, he was persecuted and the Jews wanted to kill him. He was prepared to be killed for the sake of the Lord Jesus and the mission that the Lord Jesus had given to him. That is repentance - repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God came into this world in the Lord Jesus Christ and if we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it means that we want to learn from Him, we want to observe His life, we want to hear what He has to say, we want to understand what He wants to accomplish and we are submitted to Him in all that He desires to do.

Even for Christians who have come to love the Lord, this aspect of repentance is still a major aspect in life and very often, it is very seriously neglected.

Many Christians think that because they have become Christians, the Lord Jesus is their Saviour, their sins have been forgiven, they need not continue to ponder over the issue of repentance. They can concentrate now on service, on helping other people.

It is true we should help other people, we should serve, we should care for others. But without a continuing repentance wherever we have gone wrong, we cannot properly serve, we cannot effectively help others.

And so when we read what the Lord Jesus said to the seven churches in the **book of Revelation**, we can see that this thrust was very clear. Wherever something was wrong, the Lord Jesus pointed it out so that Christians could repent, change, correct themselves and then move forward.

**Revelation 2: 1-5**

- 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
- 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false;
- 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.
- 4 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.
- 5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.

The Lord Jesus recognized many positive qualities in the church in Ephesus: "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance". They were positive. Their toil and perseverance was in a positive direction. "...you cannot tolerate evil men" – that was good, they rejected evil. "...you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false" – there was some degree of discernment; they could recognize what was of God and what was not and they did the right thing, they could identify the false apostles. "...you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary" – these are very positive qualities. They persevered, they endured for the name of the Lord Jesus. They did not grow weary. They must have gone through many difficulties but they did not grow weary.

And yet, in the midst of such positive qualities, the Lord Jesus said, "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

Yes, you are perseverant, you are doing all these things that are positive, right and good. But where is the freshness of your love for Me? What is the quality of your devotion to Me? Where is that meaningfulness of the depth of fellowship with Me?"

And this is a very common problem for many Christians.

Yes, initially we appreciate Him so much; we thank Him, we praise Him, in our hearts we adore Him, we want to be with Him, talk to Him, serve Him.

But with passing time, we may concentrate on many things to do, many aspects to attend to and we do not have that kind of freshness in our love for Him, that kind of devotion to Him that will bring joy to Him; we are no longer sensitive to what He has to say to us apart from general principles of life.

Are we walking with God each day? Are we conscious of Him? Is He so real to us? Do we talk to Him all the time? Is there that kind of quality of devotion and fellowship?

He says, "...you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen". They had fallen. That was a reality. They had fallen. "...and repent and do the deeds you did at first" – so initially, when they first came to the Lord, their response was good and positive, they loved the Lord, they appreciated Him much, but they had fallen from there. They continued doing many things, but that love for Him, the devotion, that closeness was no longer there.

And so they had to repent. "...or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent" – if they did not repent, then the lampstand would be removed out of its place.

The implication basically would be the lamp will no longer function; the light will no longer shine. They are meant to be a light that shines in this world, but without that quality of love for the Lord, the light will go out because a primary aspect of what God wants to develop is the meaning in our heart, that we pursue this path: We know, we appreciate and we can relate with Him and receive life from Him. There is a constant flow of spiritual life from the Lord; we are properly related to Him, there is that flow.

As we ponder over the subject of repentance, you will come to realize that basically, repentance has to do with denying ourselves. We have to learn to deeply deny ourselves.

Many people do not like this subject.

“Deny yourself, take up the cross” is a subject that many people dislike. They want to hear more about the love of God, the compassion of God, the grace of God. We are comforted when we fail; we come to God, He forgives us, He understands us, He will help us.

Is it right for us to appreciate these things? Yes. God is kind. He is compassionate, He understands, He wants to help us. But if we do not learn to deny ourselves, it is very difficult for God to help us. However He helps us, we continue in the self-centred way of life, we continue to pursue our own goals and ambitions. How can He properly help us?

That is why in many Christian lives, prayers do not seem to be answered and God continues to bring them through many painful, difficult circumstances because they have gone their own way and God wants to speak to them.

They need to come to Him to change their way of life but instead, they grumble, they complain, and they say God is not fair, God is not helping them. We need to learn to deny ourselves correctly and properly if we want to benefit from God's grace.

**Luke 9: 23-26**

- 23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.  
24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.  
25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?  
26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.

Here, the Lord Jesus makes it very clear that if we do not deny ourselves, if we do not take up our cross daily, we cannot properly follow Him and be His disciple. The mark of a disciple is described here: We have learnt to deny ourselves, we have learnt to take up our cross daily and we truly follow the Lord Jesus.

And in this context, He makes it clear that not denying ourselves is basically the path of sin, of rebellion, of going our own way. "...whoever wishes to save his life will lose it" – here, saving his life talks about clinging on to your self-life, clinging on to your own ways, your own desires, your own wishes rather than looking to God, submitting to Him.

If we wish to save our life in this way, we will lose our life: The true meaning of life will be gone. We will not be able to develop to become the people we ought to be. We will lose our lives.

"...but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" – when we lose our lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus, that is repentance. We have turned away from our own way of life, our own desires, in order to follow Him, to live for Him.

“...whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” – we will find the true life, a life of true meaning that will last forever.

Denying ourselves is not just saying: “I give up some of these things that I like. From time to time, I will do some things which I do not quite like to do but is good to do. I will deny myself of some of the things that I am so interested in.”

The meaning of denying ourselves in the right way, basically, at the heart of it, it means put to death the self-life. We must not go in half measures. We must go all the way: put to death. The whole attitude towards the self-life is one in which we reject it totally. That is why we have to lose our life for His sake.

Here again, we need to understand the meaning of putting to death the self-life. The self-life is a negative kind of life, where we pursue our own desires apart from what God desires, going our own way.

Putting to death the self-life does not mean that we reject ourselves in the sense that we do not seek to develop our own lives, we just disregard ourselves in everything. That is not the meaning.

The self-life is a reference to a direction, that kind of attitude, the kind of values that we hold, the things that we pursue that are wrong, that are dishonouring to God, that are self-centred, that are selfish. This is what we must put to death.

So, to give our lives properly to the Lord, to lose our life for His sake, will pave the way for receiving the right life, so we will become what we ought to be, so that we will have our life, the right kind of life.

So, it is a rejection of the wrong kind of life in order to have the right kind of life. And that life is still our life, but it is our life in Christ, our life developed through Christ. It is a life where the Holy Spirit has transformed us, where the fruit of the Spirit grows in us. So it is still “us”, but a different “us”: one has to do with the old man; the other is the new man. The old man must be put to death fully; the new man must be nurtured: old man, new man – they both refer to us.

So we need to understand: God is not asking us to destroy ourselves. God wants us to develop ourselves but develop in the right way, concentrate on the right things and to destroy that which is negative in our lives – put to death.

And so He says, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?” So here, he is talking about the self-life. What is at the heart of self-life? Gaining the world... People are pursuing this all the time. We gain the world; we want to gain the world.

And gaining the world has many, many different aspects to it. It does not refer only to those things that are so obviously negative, where people are cruel, they exploit others – they just pursue their own desires and disregard others totally. Of course, it will include that, but it is much wider than that. Even seeking for the praise of man in this world, just wanting to be great in the eyes of men rather than being faithful to God is an aspect of seeking to gain the world.

“...what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?” What if the world praises you and says that you are very good, you have done so much for society, you have contributed to so many people’s lives, but when God looks at you, He looks at your heart and He sees you are self-centred, you are seeking for your own honour? What profit would that be?

On the Judgment Day, all these things will become clear.

It is better for us not to wait for the Judgment Day for it to be clear. It is better for us to face these things now, deal with them so that we know what is going to happen on the Judgment Day. The apostle Paul knew: When he gave his life fully to the Lord and he lived for the Lord properly, he knew that on the Judgment Day, there would be a crown of righteousness waiting for him. He understood; he knew the reality of it.

And so the Lord Jesus said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels."

"...whoever is ashamed of Me and My words" - Many Christians may say, "No, no. I am not ashamed of the Lord Jesus and His words. I honour Him, I love Him; I treasure His words." It is something that we need to ponder and consider carefully. Are we ashamed of Him? Are we truly not ashamed of Him? Would we be prepared to stand with Him in every aspect of His life and being?

The Lord Jesus was crucified. The Lord Jesus was rejected by men; the world hated Him. Are we prepared to stand with Him when it comes to issues like that? If we are not, then we are ashamed of Him. The words that He said, many things that He said, were offensive to people. People were angry, they were upset. Would we stand with Him? Of course, we do not want to be unnecessarily offensive. We must seek to be kind and gentle wherever it is appropriate, but there are times when we need to take a stand for what is right and it can be offensive to people.

So if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. If we do not deny ourselves, He will deny us.

So we need to ponder over this. It is a very serious matter if we want to develop true quality in our being.

However, I want to point out that there are two different realms of denying ourselves. It is important that we appreciate this.

One realm of denying ourselves has to do with dealing with sin and self-life, which is what we have pondered over in this passage. But the other realm is the expression of the highest quality of being in a life of self-giving. We need to recognize the different realms in denying ourselves.

**John 12: 23-28**

- 23 And Jesus \*answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.  
24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.  
25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.  
26 "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.  
27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.  
28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

The context here is that there were some Greeks who approached Philip and they wanted to see Jesus. So Philip approached Andrew and both of them came to the Lord Jesus and told Him the request: they wanted to see Jesus. It is in this context the Lord Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

The Lord Jesus answered Philip and Andrew in relation to the request of these Greeks who had come to worship God and they wanted to see Jesus. Why did the Lord Jesus reply in this way?

The Lord Jesus did not say, "Yes, ask them to come and meet Me." The Lord Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

They are welcome to come and see Him. The Lord Jesus would not reject anyone who would want to come and meet Him, to know who He was, but He wanted to transmit something very important.

Are they just coming to see an ordinary prophet or somebody well known? Do they know what it means, who they are meeting?

The Lord Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." He would be the Saviour of the world. He had come to die on the cross. This is the path of His life.

They are welcome to come, but come with the recognition of who He is, what is His mission, what is He going to accomplish.

And the Lord Jesus elaborated, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

The Lord Jesus was explaining the principle of denying himself.

He did not have to deny Himself because there was no sin in Him with regard to denying the negative. The Lord Jesus came to be glorified in the sense of giving up Himself for the sins of men, giving up Himself in order to help us. He died so that we might live. He became poor so that we might be rich. He suffered the wrath of God at the cross so that we need not be condemned and sentenced to God's final punishment.

He gave up Himself, He denied Himself in order to help us.

It is like a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies, and then bears much fruit. A grain of wheat, if it does not fall into the ground, He says, "it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." There is this aspect that He is seeking to help us understand.

For Him, if He did not die on the cross, there would be no salvation, there would be no fruit amongst the sinners of this world. But if He were to die, then He would bear much fruit. There would be people who repent, people who find forgiveness, people who find life.

There will be fruit, like for example, people like the apostle Paul who could then repent and find life. The fruit arising from the death of the wheat, we can say, is the body of Christ. He died and in its place, there comes about the body of Christ: Those who now move in the direction of righteousness, who follow God, who obey Him, who can represent Him, be His ambassadors, speak on His behalf, testify in the world, manifest the glory of God.

The Lord Jesus would be glorified, not only at the time of the cross but also in eternity.

He was glorified when He died on the cross because He manifested perfect love for all mankind. He was glorified when he was raised from the dead, showing God's approval of what He had done. He was glorified when He ascended on high and was given a name above every name. He will be glorified when we all live in submission to Him, when we honour Him in His being, we acknowledge Him and follow Him. He will be glorified when He comes again to establish His kingdom on earth. He will be glorified when the bride is brought to the bridegroom in eternity, full of splendour and glory.

The Lord Jesus will be glorified but the glorification is associated with the grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying.

The Lord Jesus, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

We saw this in the last message and this is an expression of His denying Himself: He existed in the form of God, He was in a state of glory in heaven. He denied Himself of what was rightfully His in order to come into this world. He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. It was rightfully His but He gave it up. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant *and* being made in the likeness of men. He chose this path to deny Himself.

The apostle Paul appreciated it so much when he recognized what the Lord Jesus had done for him and he said,

**Galatians 2: 20**

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The Lord Jesus gave Himself up for Paul, but not just for Paul, for the whole world, for all who would repent. All of us can benefit from that. And He gave Himself up because of love. The Lord Jesus did not die for His own sins; He died for our sins. He gave Himself up not because He had to. He gave Himself up because He loved, He wanted to.

And this is the highest level of denying ourselves. We must follow Him in this path.

Then the Lord Jesus said in **verse 25 of John 12**, "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." The Lord Jesus knew that His disciples were not like Him. The Lord Jesus had no sin but His disciples had sin. So they could not properly deny themselves in the way He did, unless they first dealt with their sinful life. They must first deny themselves in dealing with sin in their lives, before they could properly deny themselves like Him.

So if we want to follow the Lord Jesus, to be good like Him, we cannot just say, “Yes, I want to be like You; just make me like You.” It will not work. We must first tell Him, “I am prepared to deal with anything that hinders this transformation to be like You. I am prepared to deny myself, to deal with whatever aspect of self-life that hinders my transformation to be like You.”

So He tells His disciples and in this context, He addressed Philip and Andrew, as well as others who may be present: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. You must deal with the self-life.” And then He says, “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me”. And following Him involves learning to deny ourselves in a spirit of self-giving, motivated by love. We must become like Him.

So when we learn to help other people, when we learn to serve God, we must understand that this is the right way to do it: out of love, purity of heart like the Lord Jesus, not with self-seeking desires, not wanting honour and praise but because we love what is good and we want to truly contribute to the well-being of others.

Is this what motivates us? If this is not what motivates us, we are not following the Lord Jesus. “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me”. The Lord Jesus walked in the path of holiness, righteousness. We must follow Him in this path.

“...and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” So He tells us it is possible for us to follow Him, it is possible for us to serve Him, it is possible for us to receive the most meaningful aspect in life, and God will honour us if we truly love Him.

And then He goes on to **verses 27 and 28** to bring to our consciousness the meaning of following Him.

He says:

- 27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.  
28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

In case we forget that the path of following the Lord Jesus is a painful path, He tells us, "This is My path; This is My life. My soul has become troubled. I am facing the cross. Why? Because of love, because of moral goodness, because I have chosen this path. So, My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? Do I want to run away from this?" He could have. He could have called upon the Father and He would immediately save Him from that situation; He need not have gone to the cross, He need not have died.

But He said, "But for this purpose I came to this hour. I came gladly, willingly to this hour. Why would I ask God to deliver Me from this?" He was not compelled. He came to this hour voluntarily. He chose this path and so He said, "Father, glorify Your name."

Are we prepared to live our lives so that we truly want to glorify God in this sense, in this kind of meaning? Not just by praising Him, saying with our lips, "God is so great; God is so good"; but by living a life that will glorify Him, doing the things that are pleasing to Him, important to Him, meaningful to Him?

The Lord Jesus is telling us if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves in dealing with the life of sin and we must follow Him in denying ourselves in a life of full self-giving to God and to what is good, where we truly care for people for their well-being, not because of anything we want to get out of it. Are we prepared to live like that? If we are not, then we are not truly following the Lord Jesus.

When our lives are self-seeking and self-centred, we will not be able to follow the Lord Jesus in His perfect example. Therefore, we must learn to deny ourselves in the realm of dealing with sin and the self-life, before we can effectively deny ourselves in a spirit of true self-giving.

In reality, in Christian development in our lives, we may experience both; it is a mixture. We deal with ourselves, our sins in our self-life. We deny ourselves, constantly seeking to deal with our lives. But at the same time, we can have a taste of what it means to follow the Lord Jesus in His spirit of self-giving. It does not mean that we must fully deal with everything before we can have a taste of what it means. It is a path of transformation, dealing with the old man to become the new man. But we must not do it half-heartedly. We must be prepared to put to death the old man. We must deny the self-life completely, totally. And if we recognize that we have not done so, to continue to persevere until we know that there is the work of God in our hearts that has transformed us, and continue to persevere and pursue that direction, that the Lord will continue to work in us to develop greater and greater quality in our being to be like Him.

The process of Christ being formed in us requires both of these aspects: We deny ourselves in the realm of dealing with sin and the self-life; and we deny ourselves in the realm of self-giving for what is good, our lives fully offered to God, seeking only to honour Him and to fulfil the path that He has called us towards, to walk in it and to live for God. It is then that we can properly fulfil His call for our lives.

The Lord willing, we will consider further how we can learn to deny ourselves effectively. The path of denying ourselves is a very difficult path. There are so many different aspects in our lives that we may not be very conscious of, but they affect us deeply.

Ultimately, it is only one thing, but it manifests in many, many different ways and that can help us recognize the presence of the self-life. There is only one thing we need to deal with, and that is the self-life. But we may not realize that the self-life is so very deep-seated and it is so very active because it can manifest in so many different ways that are not so very obvious. So we need to look to the Lord to help us understand how we can properly and fully deal with the self-life in order to be transformed to develop quality in our being.

So if we want to fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to deeply deny ourselves, both in dealing with sin and the self-life, as well as in learning to give ourselves fully to God and for whatever is good in His sight, a life of self-giving.

Let us come before the Lord and ask Him to help us to understand these issues more clearly, to appreciate the significance, the importance and yet not be discouraged when we find life to be difficult. God has placed us in a world that is very difficult because He wants to develop the highest quality in our lives.

If God had placed us in a different environment, where the self-life will not be so easily attracted to, we might find it quite easy not to sin. But God has placed us in a world where there is so much of pressure, temptation, difficulties that it is very easy to go astray. But it is in this context that we can be helped to develop a very high quality in our being and become like the Lord Jesus.

So let us ask Him to help us to understand how we can meaningfully, effectively grow in the development of our being. Let us thank Him for all that He has done for us through the cross. Let us ask Him to help us in our heart of gratitude to express this gratitude in the way we respond to Him and in the way we live our lives each day.