

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a birthday party where people waited for you to close your eyes, make a wish, and blow out a candle? This is a formality that most of us don't expect to become a reality, but we continue to do it. Every Sunday, many believers practice the same tradition. We come to church and have a party. Most who gather have a wish to be like Jesus. The flame is lit in church when the party is taking place, but by the time we hit the parking lot, the candle gets blown out, and no one believes the wish will come true. Today, we need to make the formality into reality by becoming unleashed disciples of Jesus.

In Matthew 16:22, Peter attempts to protect Jesus by telling Him to avoid suffering. Jesus, however, recognizes this as the devil's temptation. He understood that His calling to suffer was necessary for our salvation, so He focused on God's interests rather than His own self-interest. If we want to be like Jesus, we must realize that even when things are not going well, that does not mean God did not call us. God has a purpose for our suffering, and maybe it is not about *us*. First, God wants us to depend on Him. Second, God wants us to impact others. Therefore, instead of focusing on the pursuit of our own comfort and happiness, we need to seek God's interests.

Our desire to be unleashed as a disciple of Jesus Christ will only come true when we are persistent. Persistence is the ability to keep going despite obstacles, opposition, trials, and even failure. Many Christians do not persist once they realize that their flesh and faith cannot play on the same team. Christ calls us to deny ourselves. We must say *no* actively and decisively to our fleshly desires, which are already dead, and take up our cross. When we take up our cross, we allow Christ to sit on the throne of our lives.

If you want to live as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, there are only two options: sit in the seat of power and independence of your own life or surrender your life to the cross so the Savior's power is fully active. Where do you want to be found when Christ comes in glory to judge your deeds?

### GETTING STARTED

1. What is your happiest birthday memory? Did you ever make a birthday wish that came true?
2. What kinds of things do people say when they are looking out for their own self-interest, but they try to make it sound like they are interested in the benefit of others?

## LET'S GET PERSONAL

1. What sinful desires are you trying to keep alive? Are you living a surrendered life?
2. When have you seen God use suffering in your own life for a greater purpose?
3. Where do you lack persistence? What obstacles most often prevent you from following Jesus?

## TAKE THE NEXT STEP

1. In what areas of your life do you need to deny yourself? What sinful desires do you need to stop resuscitating? What Scripture might you use to help you battle temptation? Commit to memorizing that Scripture this week! Memorizing a Scripture to go with each sinful desire will help you stay strong in the face of temptation.
2. How can you begin to surround yourself with others who truly wish to follow Jesus? Pray this week for the Lord to bring someone into your life to encourage you in your Christian walk.
3. Want to dig deeper? Take a look at the following passages: Psalm 118:22; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 53:5, 10; Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 10:45; Luke 9:62; 22:42; Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:16; Philippians 2:8.

## RENEW YOUR MIND

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.’”*

***Matthew 16:24***