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CHAPTER 5

Strength to Die to Self

We cannot become what we need to be
By remaining as we are
John Mason¹

Jesus does not recommend crucifixion for everyone—He requires it. Connecting with Christ means dying to self, figuratively and sometimes literally. Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*² Simply put and with a promise attached He said, *“whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will find it.”*³

Paul gained three important benefits by losing his life figuratively:

- 1) He experienced the presence of Christ living within
- 2) He fortified his faith with substance
- 3) He found emancipation from sin’s bondage

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—
(Romans 6:6 NIV)

¹ John Mason, *Don’t Wait for Your Ship to Come In...Swim Out to Meet It*, (Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1994), p. 149.

² Mark 8:34 NIV

³ Mark 8:35 NIV

Sin is a legal concept; it literally means “missing the mark”. Living off-target with God does not accommodate an abundant life. Sin separates us from God and it deprives us from accessing His provision. Paul emphasizes a radical approach to combat sin’s relentless influence. He said, “**Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to *your earthly nature*: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.**”⁴

Dying to sin takes inner strength. It’s an ongoing process with high-maintenance demands. A clever wordsmith once said, “practice makes perfect—if first you don’t succeed, die, die again”. Paul understood the benefit of dying repeatedly to inordinate desires. Based on practical experience, he declared, “*I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”⁵

Vintage Sewage

Choosing to miss the mark of God’s standard (i.e., sin) reflects more than a bad choice. It implies a hidden agenda tainted with ulterior motives. Lust and pride entice us to reject God’s authority and to refuse His provision in favor of inferior substitutes.

Sooner or later everyone gets thirsty. An open sewer however, is the wrong place to quench a thirst. Even if we close our eyes, hold our nose, and drink from the best crystal, sewage will never hit the spot. Like sin, sewage misses the mark. No matter how dry we are, sewage cannot deliver whatever its elegant container may promise.

Sin poses as a charming thirst-quencher with deceptive sate-appeal. It’s tempting options often address legitimate needs (e.g. sex, food) or illegitimate desires (e.g. stealing, murder). Ultimately, the “*pleasure of sin*” is over rated and short-lived, i.e., “*fleeting*”.⁶ It leaves behind a guilt flavored aftertaste. Slaking any thirst with sewage triggers consequences infused with condemnation, disgrace, and grief. No one lives well by satisfying essential appetites with polluted substitutes. Despite sin’s initial flavor, its toxic slime and contaminated scum are deadly.

Offering a toast with sewage reflects a careless strategy for relationship building. The by-product of sin erodes our rapport with others and destabilizes our fellowship with God. We cannot sustain spiritual fortitude while indulging in a nox-

⁴ Colossians 1:5 NIV

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:31 NIV

⁶ Heb 11:25 ESV

ious poison. By exposing our heart to sin we undermine God's provision of strength.

Sin causes separation and death. After each exposure its toxic venom leaves us weaker not stronger. We will either die to sin or we will die in sin.

A Less Toxic Analogy with Equally Deadly Consequences

Partaking of sin is similar to chewing gum as a food substitute. The first bite injects a burst of flavor. The longer we chew however, the less we taste. Our mouth goes through the eating motions; it chews and swallows but the flavor fades and more importantly, vital nutrition fails to arrive. Like gum, sin offers limited pleasure with diminishing returns.

No matter how glamorously sin presents itself or how well Satan seasons it, sin cannot sustain life. Advertised under false pretense, sin conceals a killer instinct. It's spiked with grief and shrouded with shame. Acquiring a taste for sin perverts our perspective with a bent for evil. Alternatives advertised by Satan lose their appeal when the truth delivers its goods.

A diet restricted to God's highest standard of purity will not stunt growth or repress development. We are not weak because curiosities remain a mystery. We are weak because we fail to connect with the knowledge of the truth. Indulging in "mature audience" slime does not elevate maturity or produce a well-rounded individual. Connecting with God and His perfect provision fortifies us with abundant life.

Living Water

Humans are weak because they have not tasted enough living water. Jesus met a thirsty Samaritan at Jacob's Well; she wreaked of raw sewage. Jesus addressed her dilemma by saying:

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10 NIV)

On the last day of Passover, Jesus stood up to address a parched and dehydrated crowd. He proclaimed in a loud voice:

*"If anyone is thirsty, let him **come to me and drink**. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, **streams of living water** will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.* (John 7:37-39 NIV)

The Holy Spirit Hits the Mark

Hearing what the Holy Spirit has to say generates strength enriched with emotional fortitude and spiritual vitality. We grow stronger by gulping from a steady stream of truth, which Jesus promised to dispense. He said:

*But when he, the **Spirit of truth**, comes, he **will guide you into all truth**. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13 NIV)*

Connecting with the same Spirit that rested on Jesus affords us with a supernatural advantage. Divine scrutiny for decision making leads to wise choices. The Spirit of the Lord adds definition and substance to God's provision. Isaiah details six spiritual assets, all of which augment the Spirit of truth. He prophesied:

***The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him [Jesus the Messiah], The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.** (Isaiah 11:2 NAS)*

- The **Spirit of wisdom** leads us to connect with God and access His perfect source of supply
- The **Spirit of understanding** helps us comprehend the truth about God, others, and ourselves
- The **Spirit of counsel** reveals the truth about our circumstances and guides our response based on the truth of His promises
- The **Spirit of strength** empowers us to shine like stars as we live, love, and influence
- The **Spirit of knowledge** equips us with accurate information about God, His creation, and ourselves
- The **Spirit of the fear of the Lord** focuses our fear where it belongs so we can respond with reverence

Hidden Forces Govern Reality

Men and women, boys and girls, infants and toddlers all have vital needs and they command strong desires. How we satisfy these needs and desires at each stage of development turns out to be an important choice. While God supplies what we need and want, counterfeits abound. As in the Garden of Eden, Satan offers attractive substitutes in competition with God's supply.

With God, there's more going on than meets the eye. We are not simply biological creatures trying to live a spiritual life. We are spiritual beings living temporarily in a physical body. A potent spiritual dimension contributes life to our flesh

and insight to our soul. According to Job, *“it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand.”*⁷

Created in God’s image, we need more than food, drink, and air to support our anatomy and physiology. We live by every word spoken by God. He sustains us by the word of His power, escorting us through hidden channels fraught with spiritual conflict. As demonic adversaries attempt to subvert and exploit our longings, the Holy Spirit reinforces us with grace and truth. Jesus said, *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”*⁸

Apart from Jesus, food, beauty, and wisdom fail to satisfy our yearning for significance and belonging. Accomplishment, recognition, and reward are incomplete without divine approval. When Christ lives in us, our performance and achievements gain an appropriate context for fulfillment and satisfaction.

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⁷ Job 32:8 ESV

⁸ John 6:63 NKJ