

Read Matthew 16:21-26

1. Does Jesus really address Peter as Satan?

First of all, can you imagine trying to rebuke Jesus?! Vs 22 says “Peter began to rebuke Him.” To me that means Peter was getting in His face and telling Him off a little bit. The dictionary definition of rebuke is “sharp, stern disapproval of” What kind of reaction did Peter expect? Even then, Jesus reaction seems pretty harsh. Satan? Really? Jesus indicates that someone is in His way, trying to trip Him up and not focused on the right things. Remember that the Holy Spirit had not yet indwelt Peter, so he was just focused on human concerns. Tim told me about a play he saw one time about this story that depicted Satan standing behind Peter and whispering in his ear. Maybe Jesus was actually rebuking Satan and telling him to get away from Peter and quit messing with the program. Maybe Jesus was rebuking Peter and, in the sternest way possible, telling Peter that he was cooperating with the wrong program. Either way, it is a strong reminder to us that God is sovereign – meaning He can do whatever He wants – and He does have a plan. Like Peter, we sometimes want to lead, but we are called to **follow!** We are not in the driver’s seat. He is. You may have seen the bumper sticker that says “God is my co-pilot”. If He is – *switch seats!*

2. How can you find your life by losing it for Jesus?

It seems like God always works upside down and backwards! When we hold on, we lose. When we let go, we gain. The issue is -who is doing the work? Jesus is reminding us that when we try to hold on to things, that is us doing the work. When we let go and sacrifice for His sake, then we leave it up to Him to defend, protect and uplift us. Vs. 27 says “The Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward everyone according to what they have done.” We need to think long term and balance the temporary and momentary rewards that we might gain for ourselves in this life, with the eternal rewards that He gives. Do the math. Jesus Christ can reward us better than we could ever reward ourselves. We need to let go. What rewards do we miss out on because we are trying to protect our own lives, goals and dreams instead of letting God have them all? Check out this little poem. Broken Dreams ~ As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend, I brought my broken dreams to God because He was my friend. But then instead of leaving Him in peace to work alone, I hung around and tried to help with ways that were my own. At last I snatched them back and cried “How can You be so slow?” “My child” He said “What could I do, you never did let go”. Author unknown.

3. What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross?

Read Philippians 2:1-8. I especially like the wording in The Message.

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if His love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of Himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. We are to put others ahead of ourselves. We are to set aside any status or standing or privilege (it's not really ours anyway) and humbly serve others in the name of Jesus Christ.

4. What is the result and reward of doing so?

God does the work of lifting and honoring. He did for Jesus.... -Read Philippians 2:9-11.

Because of that obedience, God lifted Him high and honored Him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that He is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father. ~The Message

....and promises that He will lift us up and honor us as well. We get to share with Jesus Christ!

Romans 8:17 *Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. ~NIV*

1 Peter 5:6 and 10-11 *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever Amen.*

God will restore us, lift us up, and honor us – by His power – in His time – for His glory! We are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus but we know where He is going. No matter how tough the road may seem, we know the end destination. Jesus set an example for us and promises that if we follow His example through humility, suffering, persecution for His sake – taking up our cross –then we will also have the privilege of following Him to glory!

Then Jesus went to work on His disciples. Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for? Matthew 16:24-26 ~The Message

This week's memory verse: Matthew 16:24

Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Challenge:

Do you really want to be Jesus' disciple? Are you willing to do what it takes to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him? It's not easy, but it's worth more than anything!