

Forget About Yourself

By Didi Marañon

"If any one of you want to be my follower, you must forget about yourself." (Luke 3:23)

Forgetting about myself is the hardest thing for me to do! Every day, I have to make a deliberate effort to do it. Why? Because it doesn't come naturally. Some things -- like praying, being excited with God's Word, interceding for others or thanking the Lord -- come naturally. But when it comes to forgetting about myself, I'd say I'm still in kindergarten. Imagine a child learning how to write. She still needs to memorize the word, the sound, the shape of the letters and how to connect all the letters. Everything has to be deliberate and well thought of, just like self-denial. It is the first lesson in Christ's school. We can grow in prayer, read the Bible daily, serve the Lord and help the poor, but if we never learn how to forget about ourselves, we will never become disciples.

Protestant Reformer John Calvin warned, "There is no end and there is no limit to the obstacles of the man who wants to pursue what is right and at the same time shrinks back from self-denial." If you want to be righteous but you don't want to deny yourself, you'll end up facing more difficulties.

There are two things you should remember about self-denial. One, God comes first all the time, and two, others come second to God all the time. There is no instance when you are going to put yourself above God or yourself above others.

That's what the two greatest commandments teach us. The first says, "Love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength." The second goes, "Love your neighbor as yourself." God didn't have to tell us to love ourselves. It's a given. No one had to teach us. When we're born, we already think of ourselves. We need to be taught to put God first and others second all the time.

God First

When we talk about the Lord, we center on God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. There is a call to passionately seek Jesus -- with our emotions, with enthusiasm and interest. And this starts with a desire to know the Lord on a daily basis, not just on Sundays.

We express this through our desire to study the Word and, more importantly, through obedience. This means if we're reading the Word and we encounter something that we think God wants us to do in our life, we have to obey instantly. Obedience that is delayed is no obedience at all. If the Lord tells us to rejoice at that moment we are going through hardship and we do it two days later, we failed to obey.

Delaying our obedience doesn't make us disciples. We must learn to obey on His terms, not

ours. That means we obey even at the cost of personal comfort or convenience. That is self-denial.

For example, when you have to wake up earlier to pray, it will cost you sleep. Or when you give your tithes and love offerings, it will cost you money. Or reconciliation will cost you humbling your pride.

Forgetting about yourself also involves detaching from material possessions as well. The Lord gives us material possessions for our well-being, and a surplus for good works or even for our enjoyment. But there are certain things we have in our lives that already come in between our relationship with the Lord. If we want to grow in the Lord, we must detach from these things -- the encumbrances of the world, of sin, of the flesh, of materialism. We must discover that God is enough.

Others Second

Putting others second to God isn't any easier. Sometimes it's even harder. You will have to think of the other person first without grumbling. Just take the simple example of being the last to eat at a gathering. Even if you are older and of a higher stature, you let the younger ones go before you. If Jesus Christ was there, and I went ahead of Him to eat, He wouldn't grumble or think ill of me because He's humble. How about us?

Sometimes, forgetting about ourselves means being forgotten -- not being acknowledged or given credit for work you've done. Forgetting about yourself means that if you're not recognized or affirmed, you don't mind.

We must continue to forget about ourselves and just give, give and give -- and demand nothing in return. It's not easy. But not having any expectation for appreciation or any reward for ourselves is our goal.

Don't Think of Yourself

To forget yourself is a literal command. Do not think of yourself, period. In other words, do not include yourself in the equation. Do not ask questions like, "How will this affect me?" St Paul praised the Macedonian church because of their liberal giving.

Brothers, I should like you to know the grace of God conferred on the churches of Macedonia. In the face of severe trial, their overflowing joy and deep poverty have produced an abundant generosity. (*2 Corinthians 8:1-2*, emphasis added)

The Macedonian church was so poor but they gave generously. It's like a church in Smokey Mountain (a garbage dumpsite) giving to this small group of people living under a bridge. Or it could be like a family living out of a cart who found out that the homes of people in Smokey Mountain were destroyed by fire and they gave whatever little they had. They were poor but they gave generously.

Joyce Meyer, a powerful conference speaker and author, said, *“Love is all giving. Love gets nothing for itself.”* The nature of love is like that. It’s hard to internalize, that’s why we have to do it deliberately.

Trust

This selfless abandonment has trust as its basis. Luke 9:24 reads, *“Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”* We are able to forget about ourselves because we trust God to guard our life.

Devotional author Oswald Chambers said, *“If we are devoted to Jesus Christ, we have nothing to do with what we meet, whether it is just or unjust. Jesus says, ‘Go steadily on with what I have told you to do, and I will guard your life.’ He also warned us, ‘If you try to guard it yourself, you remove yourself from My deliverance.”*

This is the basis for self-denial. If we put God and others first, we have to trust that God will take care of us. And so we can stop being anxious about tomorrow. If we keep giving material things, the Lord will provide for us. If we keep on caring and we’re not affirmed verbally or physically, God will affirm and recognize us.

The Lord says, *“If you humble yourself, I will exalt you.”* We can rejoice under trial because we can rely on His promises. We can lose ourselves, we can throw our lives away, we can waste our lives on God and others because we trust that He will not abandon us. He will take care of us physically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, financially.

My one desire is to forget myself every day, every minute, under every circumstance, with every thought and motive. I battle now, I struggle every day to forget about myself. But I have confidence and trust in the Lord that, one day, it’s going to be second nature to me. Can you imagine how beautiful you and I would have become?

If you’re a person who totally puts God and others first, there’s no grabbing, no demanding, no hoarding, no holding back. Everything is just pure giving. You don’t mind being a doormat because you’re not expecting anything in return: You’re just rejoicing, and loving God and others with all your heart.

Didi Marañon is a director of the Elim Administrative Council and the author of the Inner Beauty books.