

(Deeper 2003 - 'Let It Go') Letting Go of Self - Sep 28, 2003 Am

by Stephen Fenton

Stephen Fenton's sermon emphasizes the necessity of letting go of self to fully embrace God's call and do the impossible through faith in Jesus.

Duration: 46:16

Topics: "Self Denial", "Following Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages the audience to let go of self and focus on Jesus. He emphasizes the importance of not seeking recognition or fame for oneself, but rather spreading the message of Jesus. The speaker mentions two strategies that the devil uses to shift our focus from Jesus to ourselves. One strategy is to make us concerned about what others think of us, while the other is to make us prioritize our own agendas over following Jesus. The speaker urges the audience to become available to God and to walk on water, symbolizing stepping out of our comfort zones and relying on Jesus for guidance and support.

Transcript

Remember it, let go of your heart, because He will be there for you. Then last night we looked at the whole issue of security. We talked about Matthew 14, one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible.

As Peter got out of the boat and walked in the water to Jesus. And a call, and it's a powerful call, and it's a relevant call, and it's a call that he's making today to his people. I want you on the water.

Just as he called the young man, come to a place where you're not in control anymore. As he calls the guest, come to a place where I will love you, cherish you, and make you worthwhile. He calls his people and says, now come on the water, and on the water you'll realize the only one that counts is me.

The only power that means anything is mine. The only miracle that you'll see is the one that keeps you afloat. The only faith that you'll focus upon is my faith.

The only one who will have the answers to your questions is me. You don't have to rationalize it out. You don't have to work it out.

You don't have to gift it out. You just have to get on the water, and I will hold you up. That is what being a Christian in this generation is all about.

It's what being a Christian in any generation has always been about. But we are called again, because although we perhaps didn't realize that every single disciple followed Peter onto the water, not at that moment, but later in their lives, every single one of those men, apart from Judas who betrayed him, walked on water with Christ. What I mean by that is they did impossible things for Jesus, but they did those impossible things by Jesus, through Jesus.

There is no question that God asks us to do the impossible. Some people challenge the teaching that has become the center, which is the teaching of Christ as all, and say, if Jesus is everything, nothing will get done, because he's in heaven, we're on earth. He expects us to work.

You know what? You're right. He doesn't expect us to work. He expects us to walk on water.

He expects us to do the impossible. He gives us tasks beyond us. We cannot, we cannot do the task.

Like Paul says in 2 Corinthians, who is equal to such a task? It's the one that God has called us to. None of us. But then Paul goes on to say, but our competence for that calling is from God.

The all-surpassing power is his. Jesus calls us on to the water so that men will see, women will see, young people will see, that we do impossible things, but it's not us. It's so clearly not us.

So young people and men and women in every generation have been called to do things that shouldn't be able to be done. They have done them, but as people have seen the impossible, they see Jesus is there, and they're drawn to him. So like in every other generation, God is calling this generation of leaders to do the impossible, and to do that, he's calling you on the water.

And they had to do it, and we have to do it. Being a Christian is not being in a comfortable pew. Being a Christian is not about having a safe, cozy little lifestyle.

Being a Christian is not about settling into your house, your home, your lifestyle, your family, and living for the rest of your life in veritable comfort. It's about being called out onto the water with the Lord Jesus Christ, living a radically different lifestyle by and through the power of God Almighty, through the presence of the Spirit within us, the Spirit of Christ who says, walk with me. So God is calling people out of addiction.

He's calling them out of their possessions. He's calling them out of power trips. He's calling them out of places of control.

He's calling them to let go of their security, to give their lives away. Some of you will get to the end of your life, and you'll have spent a great deal of time making money, making yourself comfortable, establishing yourselves, and I say ourselves, in homes, and realize that it's all just dust. Better to get to his presence and realize that we walked on the water with Jesus Christ, that he called us to the mission fields of this world, including this country, which is vastly, vastly a mission field, rapidly slipping into spiritual anarchy.

God calls us to give our lives away here and elsewhere, not to get it all together in our heads, not to build strategies that come out of the human heart, not to establish the plans ourselves. My friends, Jesus has a plan, and you know what? It's not only a good one, it'll work. What he wants you and me to do is get on the water with him to let go of our security, let go of our control, let go of our hearts so he can fill it, and let go

of our security.

And I challenge young and older like this one, some of you'll be thinking, yeah, this is a good message for the young, it's a good message for you, it's a good message for me. Time is running out, it stands at the very threshold. This world is passing away.

The kingdom of heaven is upon us. Don't miss the opportunity to walk on water. Say, how do I do that? To become available.

It's that simple. It's not about your abilities, it's about your availability. Are you available to God? People came to Jesus one day and said, I will follow you wherever you go, I just need to go and bury my father.

It wasn't necessarily that the man's father was dead. What he was saying to Jesus, I will follow you wherever I go, but I've got a little agenda to finish first. I've got to take care of my father, and when he's dead and buried, then I'll follow you.

What did Jesus say? Let the dead bury their dead, you follow me. It wasn't carelessness, it wasn't coldness. He was saying, my friend, don't let any other agenda stand in the way of the call that I've given you to walk on water with me.

Leave those who don't know me to take care of those things, and you walk with me. The other man said, let me just go and say goodbye to my family. Jesus said, if a man puts his hand to the plow and then turns around and walks away from that, he's not worthy of me.

What a challenge. Not easy words. He's saying, let there be no other priority in your heart but to walk with me.

Let there be no other agenda but to be on the water with me. I will take care of everything, including those necessities. You follow me.

Today the call remains the same. This morning I want to bring you one more challenge, and actually for those of you that are not living off-island and will be around this afternoon, and please, those of you who are connected to the tree, please understand you're welcome to stay through the day with us and hang out and enjoy the weather here, and then meet with us at six o'clock this evening, because I have a fifth message in this series. God gave me thighs.

I didn't ask for any number. He gave me thighs. I encourage you to come back for the fifth one, but today I want to encourage you to let go of self.

So we've heard, let go of control. Let go of your heart. Let go of security.

Let go of your mind. Let go of your body. I want to challenge you today to be letting go of self.

It's so easy for the Lord to slip into a secondary place, and for our focus to shift almost imperceptibly to ourselves. The devil has two main strategies for doing this. Let me show you one of them in the other as we do.

In Luke chapter 9 and verse 18, the Lord Jesus was praying in private with his disciples. He asked them, who do the crowds say that I am? Boys, what's the buzz? What are the people saying about me? Obviously the men were interested and had signed out, and they said, man it's great. Some say John the

Baptist.

Now John was dead already, but some were saying he's back. Others say Elijah, dead even longer, but represented the most powerful, supernaturally powerful of the Old Testament prophets. A great hero in Jewish legend.

And still others that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life. Lord, it's exciting. Man, Lord, it's so good to be connected to you.

Because people just, they're in awe of you, and they think you're truly something powerful. So powerful you could even be Elijah back in the flesh, or John the Baptist raised from the dead, or one of the great prophets from the past, whom God has sent again. Now what about you? Yes, who do you say I am? Peter piped right up.

Dear old Pete. God was working in his heart. God was teaching him.

God had revealed him some awesome things. He was way ahead spiritually in some ways than some of the other disciples. That's why he walked on water first.

You see, you are the Christ. You are the Messiah. You're God's anointed one.

You're the one he has sent into the world. And we're your generals. You're everything Lord, a witch.

We're just so excited. A couple of days later, they're arguing on a journey. You see it further along in this chapter in verse 48.

But which of them would be the greatest? I mean, they were so excited about what was going on. They were so happy about what was happening. They were in for it.

They were up for the challenge. Jesus was more than they could have hoped for or expected. People were so excited and they were the inner sanctum circle.

And you can tell right in this chapter what that did to them. You can tell how Satan used the excitement and the wonder of Christ and then slowly, just imperceptibly, just momentarily, momentarily and momentarily, bumped them aside. He just nudged them.

And so instead of their focus being on, wow, Jesus, what is it that you want to do? Who is it that you really are? Where are you going? What is it that you want of us? We belong to you. You're the one God has sent. Suddenly, they're thinking, I wonder where I sit in the new government.

I wonder where I am in the new world order. And they actually got so caught up with it, they began to argue with one another who was greater. James and John were fiery characters.

They were certain that they were ministers of justice. Lord, we're the boys with the swords. Anybody doesn't, look, we are the enforcers.

They started wearing sunglasses. We're the ones. People don't believe in you, Lord, we'll call the fire from heaven.

They actually tried it out once. Went into a village where they were unacceptable. Both the boys sidled up alongside the Lord Jesus, stuck the old sunglasses on and said, is this the time we stop them? James and

John's mother came to the Lord Jesus somewhere around the same period of time and silently, quietly took him aside, preened his feathers a little bit and said, Jesus, you're wonderful.

You're awesome. He's got a kingdom. I would really like it if my boys were first and second in control.

What do you think of that idea? Don't you think they're worthy? Aren't they awesome? That's so good. It makes such a good prime minister and vice prime minister. Don't you think? You know what, I think Jesus was amused.

I really do. And also challenged, because he knew what was coming. And he looked at John and James and he said, can you accept the baptism that's coming? Baptism, Lord, we love baptism.

But they didn't realize that the baptism Jesus was talking about was death. And I don't even think John and James knew what they were saying. But they said, yes, Lord.

And before the church was a matter of months old, James was executed by Herod. And as an old man, John was exiled to an island to live and die alone. And as the disciples thought with excitement about who Jesus was, Jesus says, or the scripture says here in Luke 9, that Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anyone.

And he said, the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. And he must be killed on the third day. He must be killed.

And on the third day, be raised to life. Boys, here's where all this excitement's going. You want to be great in the kingdom, you better understand what this kingdom is about.

You think I'm so awesome? And of course they were right. He was awesome, is awesome. He wanted them to know how the kingdom of heaven works on the earth.

It's a call to suffering. It's a call to death. And this is where some of you are thinking, popular teaching.

I mean, we could make CDs and sell this. This is where some of you are thinking, holy, we better change this guy's attitude because that will just never do. It's exactly what Peter said.

As Jesus continued to emphasize that the kingdom of heaven on the earth was a call to death and suffering, Peter said, not so, Lord. God forbid. You're not going to die.

Peter and John called on fire. I have a sword tucked away in the back. Anybody comes here near you, Lord, they're done for.

And he proceeded to prove it. Took a swing at the head of a priest's servant who came near Jesus. Fortunately, the man was quick enough to dodge and he just lost an ear.

Right? Until the cross, these men had no clue. Even after the resurrection, some of them said to him, okay, suffering part's over, right? Now we're going to see your kingdom established? Now we're going to throw out the Romans? Now we're going to have David's Israel all over again? Right? Right? Right? And Jesus was saying, whatever. Man, you don't have a clue.

Suffering's only started. The flip side of the call to let go of yourself is the call to let go of your heart. If you want to be ravished by the love of God in such a way as you know what it truly means to live, let go of your

heart, but understand as we let go of our hearts that such will be the love that pours into us.

We will do anything he asks us to do. And what he asks us to do is to let go of ourselves, all our agendas and plans, and to accept that the call to let go of self is a call to suffering. There is no other way to understand the call of Jesus Christ.

Now, it's worth it because all around us, boys and girls and men and women will come to Jesus and hope will burn in hearts. Love will abound. Grace will be absolutely unstoppable.

It won't happen until we let go of self. Jesus modeled it in his calling, in his love, in his ministry, and in this commitment to die, to suffer. I love what Keith Green said.

He said, we want to cross. We want a posturepedic cross. We want a comfortable cross.

We want to cross with bad strengths, not nails. Again and again, God calls us to let go of self, and again and again, whether we realize it or not, and many of us don't, that means he calls us to the end of our strengths, to the end of our agendas, to the end of our abilities, so that finally we can let go of our own plans, what we want, what we desire, what we aim, what we promised, what we planned in the ministry and in the kingdom of heaven, things that we thought we would do for him, the challenges that we thought we would meet, the positions that we thought we would take in the kingdom of heaven. Take the back seat.

Jesus comes to the front and says, yes, yes, if you accept this baptism, you can serve me. If you accept this baptism, we will do great things together. If you allow me to lead, then nothing can stop us, but truly, my friend, you will die in the process.

You will die in every way conceivable. You will decrease, I will increase. It will not be easy, nor painless.

It will rip your heart apart, but we will win the world. There's no other way. Out there and in here, people come to us who have been sickened and poisoned by the world's love affair with itself.

And out there, there are young people and men and women who are desperately searching, wondering if there is something better. And there is, but it has to be modeled by those who have found that if we just become like the world, caught up with ourselves, our agendas, our plans, our sophistications, our education, our ministries, the aims and the dreams that we have for the sake of the kingdom, if we get caught up with those, we just become like another corporation, another little empire. We get caught up with those, then men take control.

We get caught up with men taking control, then we eat one another alive, thankfully all the way through the centuries of the history of the church, God has called men and women and boys and girls out onto the water on itself. There are always those who are the weakest, always. He calls the weak.

If you're weak, if you're broken today, you're a candidate for this call. If you know that you have nothing left to offer, then you're a candidate for this calling. If you know that when you get out there, you have nothing to give, you're a candidate for the kingdom of heaven and the usefulness of God.

You think you've got it together? Wait for a while. But if you're here and your heart breaks and you know, oh Lord, oh God, you have called me to let go of control and it's been the hardest thing I've ever done. And actually Lord, you took it from me in ways I'd never even expected.

You've called me to let go of my heart and I know that you love me. Despite all of this, I know that you love me and your love is that which keeps me breathing and loving back. Even when I'm hurt, even when I'm confused, even when there's darkness in the world around me, I know that love abides.

I love you because you first loved me and it bubbles over and explodes from me. And I know you're asking me to let go of my security and I know that all of this must come to fruition when I let go of self. Jesus said, boys, this is the way it is.

I'm not going to become the king of Israel in the way that you think. The coronation is going to be the road they call the way of self. Those who march me to my throne will beat and spit and kick and hate.

My crowning will be the most painful experience of my life on the throne. I'll get across the throne. At this stage, they didn't even truly begin to understand much, but what Jesus was saying, I need you to come with me.

The amazing thing is that these men did give their lives. The happiest, most powerful, most used group of young people the world has ever seen. They gave their lives.

Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself. I don't need that to happen. I need other people to be denied because it just hurt me.

I need other people to hear this message. I'll take the CD afterwards and I'll give it to so-and-so. Does he ever need it? Does she ever need it? Hold the phone.

He's calling you on the water. Calling you to give up your heart. Calling you to let go of control.

He's calling you to deny yourself. Simply let go of all the dreams, all the desires. Some people think, oh yeah, let going of self, denying yourself, oh yeah, that means we deny all the bad stuff.

We won't allow ourselves to do the bad stuff. That's not what Jesus said. He said, deny yourself period.

Leave aside the good stuff too. All the stuff that you thought you would do for God. What, so that you can do nothing? No, so that he can tell you actually what he is going to do through you, for you, by you.

So that he can tell you the impossible things that he's asking you to do. The water, show you the stretch of water that he wants you to walk on and that he will hold you up in. The impossible things that will draw men and women and boys and girls to Christ through your life, through your sacrifice, through your pain.

You leave aside all your gifts, all your talents, everything you thought was good, everything you thought was bad, just everything period. When he calls you to let go of self, God does not want you to think less of yourself. He doesn't want you to think more of yourself.

He just doesn't want you to think of yourself at all. That's what the denying self means. When it doesn't matter what men think or say or do because your eyes are on Jesus and your heart is open to him and he sustains you by his love.

Because he is in control because you're on the water with him. It doesn't matter whether men praise you or don't praise you. It doesn't matter whether they accept you or don't accept you.

It doesn't matter whether you're considered to be worthwhile or not worthwhile. Remember the words of the apostle Paul in 2nd Corinthians, we are considered imposters and yet genuine. We are considered those who are something and yet we are nothing or nothing and yet we are something.

We are considered those who have this or who have that but really this is the way we are. I mean read it, it's there. He says what we are is the servants of Jesus Christ and we live with our eyes on God under the power of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We're walking on water. When you let go of self like that and you have to let it go, God will accomplish this. You just have to take your hands off and say well I didn't know it was like this.

I didn't know that it would involve this. I didn't know that there would be pain. I thought it was going to be wonderful, Hollywood like but I'm willing to let go of myself Lord and you, you come forward.

That's why a saxophone player can end up to be a guitar player. That's why a carpenter can end up to be a missionary. That's why a healthy person will end up being unhealthy.

That's why a man who walks will end up crippled. In it all, Jesus Christ comes through. If you want to follow me, deny yourself.

Let go of yourself. Spend so much time thinking about what we'll do for the kingdom and it's time you started thinking about what Jesus will do for his own glory. Just leave aside your ideas.

The positive way is the way the enemy will catch us. Just think about what we will do and soul distracts. It's just a little bump.

It's still all for Jesus. The devil doesn't care about that. You can be all about Jesus.

You can be all about serving him. You can be all about being the best you can be for him and whatever it is you think he's called you to do. So start on the old treadmill and it's just a little bump but it focuses you on the positives of what you can do.

If he can't get you there, he'll bump you to the negatives. If he can't cripple you with positive thoughts about yourself, he'll cripple you with negative thoughts about yourself. I'm such a loser.

I can't be anything to God. He'll cripple you with guilt. He'll cripple you with the pain of your past.

He'll cripple you with the pain of your presence and all it is in the end is just more self. You'll run around looking for healing and you'll run around looking for answers about your problems and you'll run around looking for release from your wounds and truly God will do all of that for us. But he doesn't want us to stay focused on those things because it's just the same as the positive self.

It's just more of self. We are spending thousands of dollars going to psychoanalysts, psychiatrists and psychologists simply so that we can discover how much pain we are in. While some of their ministry is vital because they can show us where our wounds are, we can spend the rest of our lives buried under our own pain or we can come to Jesus and say, I'm going to take my hands off this pain and myself.

I'm going to let you heal my wounds and I'm coming on the water with you. The devil will seek to nudge you off in either direction. So you start running for the prime minister of heaven or you get buried in your own pain.

Let go. It's not about not having doughnuts and eating soury instead. It's about not thinking about what you want, what you are at all.

All wrapped up, caught up, swept up. He says you gotta deny yourself. You gotta take up your cross dead.

What does that mean? Well there is an indication of how the Lord will help you stay honest. This is what God will do for you as you let go of yourself. He will send into your life daily the things that will crucify this life and say, oh that means I'm in for a terrible life.

It does mean you're in for a lot of tears. You realize how self-centered, self-oriented, how much self-effort has been the heart of your existence and how selfish you've been with people around you. Yes, in that respect He will bring the cross to you and He'll use all kinds of things, all kinds of people, all kinds of circumstances and you'll spend a good deal of your time repenting.

But with it comes absolute freedom to see Jesus as He is, the Lord of your life, the Savior of the world, the lover of your soul, the winner. There is such freedom in getting over yourself and allowing every day the Lord to keep you on the cross, to accept every day the instrument of suffering. Yes, but it's also, listen, credit to resurrection.

God has promised that in every one of us there is resurrection life. Listen to what He says in Ephesians through the Apostle Paul. I'm almost finished.

He says, I pray also that the eyes, this is Ephesians 1:18, of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the sense and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the very same power, the very same working of His mighty strength which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but in the age to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything.

Listen, for the church, on behalf of the church, we are called to let go of self so that He can nail us to the cross daily, so that He can raise us with Christ in victory moment by moment. People want to get to the victory, but they don't want to face the cross. The road, He will do it for you.

You can't crucify yourself, that's impossible. He had to give Himself into the hands of the Jews and the Romans. They became God's instruments in the life of Jesus Christ.

You give yourself into the hands of God so that you will crucify Him. Jesus is in the sacristy here, it's not about Stevenson, thank God. It would be a poor ministry.

It's not about Pastor Kevin, it's not about Pastor Chad, Pastor Joe, any of the other pastors that we've got. Pastor Mack, son of David, is calling for the misfits, the rejects, brokenhearted. He's gathering together a group of mighty men, women, just like David of old, just as David was the center, around which these mighty men gathered.

So Jesus, man, you know what? I don't care if I'm the guy that just has to brush up the dirt, as long as I'm on the team, and I'm watching Him raise up mighty men, mighty women, who are focused on Him. Here is the secret, not on our denominations. Listen, God grant, I wish I could say I'm a prophet.

I don't know if I am or not. I don't really care. But denominations must end, because they've taken away our focus from the King of kings and Lord of lords, and placed them upon our little distinctives.

It's got to end. And before Jesus comes in glory, it'll all be over, and we'll all just be suffering Christians for the sake of Christ. Personal agendas, dreams for the kingdom have got to end.

And all the mothers of James's and John's's have got to sit back and realize, if you're going to ask for your son or your daughter to be great, you're asking that they die. Those of us who want to be the greatest have got to learn what Jesus said to His disciples in verse 48 of the very chapter that we're in, in Luke chapter 9. He placed a child in the middle of them, and He said this, whoever welcomes this child in My name, this little child in My name welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me, welcomes the One who sent Me. For He who is least among you all, He is the greatest.

If you want to follow Me, He said, you have got to deny yourself. You have got to disappear. You have got to decrease.

And I will keep you straight and honest, because if you will do this, if you will say, yes Lord, if you will let go of yourself, then I will grant you a cross every day. And it could be any number of things. I can't tell you what it'll be, but it'll keep you honest on the water.

Let go of control. Let go of your security. Let go of self.

We know what will happen. Read the Acts of the Apostles, and you'll know what will happen. And if ever there was a time when we need to see it again, and if ever there was a time similar to that first century, it's now.

And if ever the call was lied, it's as lied as it's ever been. Come! Let it all die. Walk with Me.

Deny yourself. Just forget yourself. Accept from Me the instrument of your own selfish heart.

Dearly, follow Me. And we will win the world. Scary, isn't it? But don't you feel the excitement? Don't you feel the Holy Spirit renewing you within? I'm going to release those of you that need to thank you for coming back at six o'clock for the fifth message in this series.

Now, I don't often do series, series, series, but my grammar is real good. No, but we want to tell you this series will be available on CD. It is, in fact, today.

Up until today, you can get every one of these messages, and the last one will be on CD as well. And I urge you, not because I'm sort of egotistical. I don't care.

I don't even, we won't even put my name on it. Just the name of the series. Give it to people and say, listen to this, whoever is preaching.

It doesn't matter. Just listen to it. I don't give a hoot about that.

People won't remember my name in five minutes anyway. The moment I'm gone and enjoy in heaven, people will forget me. But this message, this call, this Jesus needs to be heard.

And He is being heard. And you guys, you young people, you young leaders, you're the ones that are hearing. Now, respond.

Say, yes, Lord. I'm going to come, and I'm going to leave aside. I'm going to let go of my control.

I'm going to let go of my heart so you can feel it, Lord. I'm going to let go of my security, and I'm going to let go of myself. Do this.

I don't even know how it works, but I'm kicking my hands off it today. Do this, Lord. I want to walk on water.

And these things you've learned, faithfully teach others. Let's pray, and then the band are going to come and sing. If you have to leave, please be free to leave.

We're going to worship for a while. So we respond to the things we've heard. The kids from there, the young people, they're not kids, young adults from the retreat, pizza's coming, but pizza is good whether it's hot, warm, or cold.

So we're not worried about that. We're just going to stay and worship for a while. It's great.

We're in no rush today. There's no schedule to worry about. Actually, we didn't seem to worry much about the schedule any time this weekend.

But this is dismissal for those of you that feel you have to leave, and of course, we understand that some of you have to. You don't feel bad. I just urge you to leave as quietly as you can, but you're chatting in the parking lot.

I couldn't remember the phrase.

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