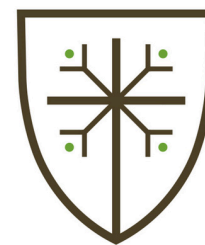


SERMON NOTES



June 7, 2026

SERMON INFO

TITLE

"The Invitation to Self-Denial"

PREACHER

Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt

TEXTS

Micah 6:6-8

Ephesians 4:30 5:2, 15-16

Matthew 6:16-18, 21-26

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What set of characteristics is more descriptive of your life?
As a reminder, the first set is bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, anger, and malice, and the second set is kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.
2. Human life, especially in Christian lives, experiences "flips" between the two sets of characteristics above, specifically from the loving set to the malicious set. What makes you flip?

SERMON IN SUMMARY

Tim continued our exploration of the book of Ephesians by focusing on self-denial. His beginning questions were what role does self-denial play in living flourishing, full lives as Christians? And what is self-denial, and why is it so central to Christian life?

The Imitation of God

If we want to deny ourselves and imitate God, we need to know what God is like. Paul offers two sets of characteristics, one that is opposite to God and one that describes God. The characteristics opposite of God are rooted in malice, one of the manifestations of a life apart from the Lord, and the other five are fruits of malice: bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, and anger. Malice is a deeply wrong and dark state of the human soul that arises due to the fallen state of humanity and the rule of sin in our lives; the various other qualities wreak havoc on varying scales— from private to public, from loud to quiet— in all stages and relationships. Lastly, they all can be understood as taking from others. In contrast, our God is a loving and self-giving God, and from him, kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness flow. Though these words sound boring, there is an unmistakable depth to them when we look beyond the translation. Kindness is better understood as useful or fitting, especially in the sense of a servant providing remarkably pleasing service to a master.

Tenderheartedness describes a goodness that extends to the very core of one's being. Forgiveness is acting in grace. All of these seek to describe the nearly incomprehensible love that characterizes our God. It is important to note that love is not merely a feeling, but a sacrifice, and it is through imitation of God and the Spirit's indwelling presence in those who are united to Christ that we can become like him who is sacrificial and loving.

The Denial of Self

To imitate God, we must deny ourselves. We can look to our gospel reading to understand the tension in doing so. At the beginning, Peter is lauded by Jesus as the foundation rock on which the church will be built, only for the Apostle to recoil a few lines later at the thought of Jesus' imminent sacrifice, garnering the rebuke of "Get behind me, Satan." Peter "flipped" back to a worldly understanding of events rather than a godly understanding, and that threatened to mar his relationships. Jesus rebukes Peter back in line so that he is once more following his Lord. Often, flipping becomes more common after one is united with Christ because there is new knowledge, knowledge of God's character, yet the old ways of malice are tempting. Putting back on malice is like putting old, dirty clothes back on. That is why we must deny ourselves the impulse daily, as often and as regularly as we get dressed in the morning. To deny oneself is to do what Peter did to Jesus later in the Gospel when he said, "I do not know the man" regarding Jesus during the Passion. Except we must say that about ourselves; we don't know ourselves as the lords, kings, saviors, organizing centers of our lives. Self-denial isn't self-destruction but rather self-dethronement. Your life begins to take shape when you stop letting it revolve around yourself, when you start giving and stop taking.

It is possible to become a new man or a new woman by becoming an imitator of Christ. This can begin by forgiving a long-held grudge, lingering in conversations you tend to rush through, serving rather than scrolling or indulging, reading and listening to God's word, and listening to others instead of excessively talking and complaining. It takes time, but following Jesus can conform us to the very character of God himself for his glory and our good.