

Leader's Guide

Following Jesus

Dying to Live

John 12:20-36, Philippians 3:7-8

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Conversation Goal

To help group members understand Jesus' call to die to self, honestly identify anything they may be holding too tightly or repeatedly picking back up, and trust the Holy Spirit enough to surrender it so that He can produce new fruit in their lives.

Synopsis

As Jesus moves closer to the cross, He uses the image of a kernel of wheat to explain both His own death and the life of anyone who follows Him: *"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."* Jesus' way to life runs through death; first His death for us, and then our ongoing surrender as His disciples.

Amos challenged us to consider the "seeds" we're reluctant to bury. Sometimes we know God is asking us to surrender something, but instead of putting it to death, we simply set it down where we can pick it back up later. Dying to self means loosening our grip on anything that competes with Jesus, not only obvious sin, but our preferences, control, self-righteousness, reputation, traditions, comfort, or even good things we've allowed to become too important. The invitation isn't surrender for surrender's sake. **The seed dies so that new life and greater fruit can grow.**

1. Why does Jesus connect dying with living?

Discussion Question

Jesus says that a seed must fall to the ground and die in order to produce fruit. What does that image teach us about following Him?

Teaching Point

The kingdom of Jesus often turns our natural instincts upside down. We want to hold on; Jesus teaches us to surrender. We want to protect ourselves; Jesus calls us to trust Him. We want life on our terms; Jesus says that true life is found when we give ourselves to Him.

A seed that remains protected and untouched remains only a seed. Its potential for new life is released when it is surrendered to the ground. In the same way, dying to self isn't about becoming less alive. It's trusting Jesus enough to release what we're clinging to so He can produce something greater through us.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why does surrender often feel like loss at first?
- How is dying to self different from simply denying ourselves anything enjoyable?
- Where have you experienced something good growing out of a difficult surrender?
- How does Jesus' own journey toward the cross help us understand this passage?

Additional Scripture

- **Luke 9:23-24** — Take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.
 - **Galatians 2:20** — "I have been crucified with Christ."
 - **Romans 6:6-11** — Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.
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2. Have I buried it or just put it down?

Discussion Question

Amos used the picture of setting a seed down rather than burying it, leaving it close enough to pick back up. Where do you see the difference between temporarily setting something aside and genuinely surrendering it to God?

Teaching Point

Sometimes we mistake temporary restraint for surrender. We put something down because we know God is asking us to, but we keep it within reach.

We may stop the behavior without releasing the desire for control. We may walk away from a conflict while holding onto resentment. We may give something to God in prayer and spend the rest of the day trying to take control of it again.

Surrender means giving God permission to do more than temporarily interrupt something. It means releasing our claim to it.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why are we tempted to keep surrendered things within reach?
- What are some things we commonly "give to God" and then take back?

- How can we tell when we've truly surrendered something?
- Can surrender be both a decisive moment and an ongoing process?
- Is there something you've repeatedly picked back up after giving it to God?
- What makes that particular thing difficult to release?
- What might it look like to actually "bury the seed"?

Additional Scripture

- **Romans 12:1-2** — Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice.
 - **Psalms 37:5** — Commit your way to the Lord and trust Him.
 - **1 Peter 5:6-7** — Cast your anxieties on Him.
 - **Matthew 16:24-25** — Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow.
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3. What am I holding too tightly?

Discussion Question

What kinds of things can become difficult for us to surrender even when they aren't necessarily sinful or wrong? How do we recognize when a good thing has begun competing with Jesus?

Teaching Point

Dying to self isn't limited to obvious sin. Sometimes what we're holding is perfectly good: a hobby, career, relationship, tradition, dream, possession, or preference.

The question isn't simply, "**Is this bad?**" A better question may be: "**Can Jesus have it?**"

When something becomes untouchable (when we can't imagine releasing it, changing it, or allowing God to use it differently) it may reveal how tightly we're holding it.

Following Jesus means learning to live with open hands. We can enjoy God's gifts without requiring them for our security, identity, or happiness.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why can good things sometimes be harder to surrender than obviously sinful things?
- What's the difference between enjoying something and needing it?
- What does an "open-handed" life look like practically?
- What happens when our preferences become demands?
- How might our need for control reveal something we're holding too tightly?
- What about reputation, success, comfort, being right, or having things our way?

- Finish this sentence privately: "Jesus, You can have anything except _____. " What does your response reveal?

Additional Scripture

- **Matthew 6:19-21** — Where your treasure is, your heart will be also.
 - **Mark 10:17-22** — The rich young ruler discovers what he cannot release.
 - **Psalms 139:23-24** — Invite God to search the heart.
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4. What if surrender actually leads to freedom?

Discussion Question

What makes us afraid to surrender something to God, and what would we have to believe about Him in order to open our hands?

Teaching Point

Underneath our resistance to surrender is often a question of trust.

Will God really take care of me? What if I give this up and nothing better comes? What if obedience costs more than I expected? What if God's way isn't what I want?

Jesus doesn't promise that surrender won't hurt. A seed going into the ground really does disappear. But He does teach us that death in His hands can become the beginning of new life.

Dying to self isn't slavery; holding tightly to everything we think we need is. There is freedom in reaching the place where we can say, "**Jesus, if You want it, You can have it.**"

Follow-Up Prompts

- What are we usually afraid will happen if we surrender?
- What does our reluctance to surrender reveal about what we believe about God?
- Which characteristics of God make Him trustworthy with what matters most to us?
- Have you ever surrendered something and later recognized fruit you couldn't see at the time?
- How can we trust God when we don't see immediate results?
- What would greater freedom look like in an area you're currently holding tightly?

Additional Scripture

- **Proverbs 3:5-6** — Trust in the Lord rather than your own understanding.

- **Romans 8:28-32** — The God who gave His Son can be trusted.
 - **Psalms 84:11-12** — God withholds no good thing.
 - **John 15:1-5** — Fruit comes through remaining in Christ.
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5. What is my seed?

Discussion Question

As you've listened to this message and our conversation, what might the Holy Spirit be asking you to put in the ground? And what would obedience actually look like?

Teaching Point

Amos intentionally didn't tell the congregation what their "seed" was because that's the Holy Spirit's work. For one person it might be an unhealthy relationship. For another, resentment, control, a habit, reputation, comfort, a preference, or the need to be right.

The important thing is not simply identifying it. **The seed has to go into the ground.**

We can spend a long time thinking about surrender, talking about surrender, praying about surrender, or intending to surrender. Eventually, obedience requires action.

Follow-Up Prompts

- What has the Holy Spirit brought to mind during this conversation?
- Have you known for a while that God was asking you to release something?
- What has kept you from doing it?
- What would "burying it" look like rather than simply setting it down?
- Is there a practical action you need to take?
- Who could help you remain accountable so you don't pick it back up?
- **What will you do this week in response to what God has shown you?**

Additional Scripture

- **James 1:22-25** — Don't merely listen; do what the Word says.
- **John 14:15** — Love for Jesus expressed through obedience.
- **Philippians 2:12-13** — God works in us to desire and act.
- **Hebrews 12:1-2** — Throw off what hinders and run with perseverance.