

Counterintuitive Jesus  
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Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

Following Jesus is counterintuitive

I learned how to downhill ski as an adult. I definitely wished I had learned as a child. My kids didn't have far to fall and they weren't really concerned about getting hurt! For me, it was counterintuitive. My intuition tells me that flying down a hill in between trees isn't smart. Also, skiing is counterintuitive because instead of leaning back, you need to lean forward, parallel with the slope, and let yourself go. My intuition for self-preservation definitely slowed down my ability to ski!

Jesus tells His disciples that if they want to follow Him, they need to go against their intuition, deny themselves, and pick up their cross. Ironically, if not paradoxically, Jesus tells us that when you lose your life you find your life! Our intuition is geared toward self-preservation over everything else. More than that, today we applaud not just self-preservation, but self-actualization, self-realization. Follow your instincts, follow your heart, follow your dreams, be yourself - are the mantras of the age. Me, me, me. Denying yourself is opposite of any slogan we hear today.

We want to be the king of our kingdom, against God and others. That's our instinct ultimately. We want to make the rules, we want to control our world, we want to come out on top. Yet it's our instincts that get us in trouble, alienate others, and leave us hollow humans. It is our instinct and intuition that brought us any calamity you read about.

Jesus calls us to go against our instincts in terms of inventing our own morality, but also in terms of loving others. Jesus tells us to do something that world and most religions call evil - love your enemies, let alone your neighbor, be overly generous to those around you, forgiven those who hurt you- even 70x7 times! Following Jesus might very well seem to go against your desire to survive, like leaning into the hill when skiing. You might look pretty dumb doing them. You might even look like you hate your life.

Yet who is it that we are following? It is the one who denied himself and even laid down his life for his enemies - you and me. It is the one who picked up the cross, a cross too heavy for us to bear. He allowed himself to be stripped of everything for you, for your neighbor, for your enemy. And three days later He picked it up again. He is risen. You will rise too! You don't need to fear losing your life, or falling down. You don't need to live as if this is all we have so grab it now. You know it will be ok. You are freed to not have to worry about self-preservation, self-actualization, self-realization.

It's ironic but true. We actually find ourselves by denying ourselves and following Christ. We embrace suffering and find life. We carry a cross and discover a

resurrection. So let your ego go. Lean into the hill. In Christ we find not only life tomorrow, but today.