

Journey To The Cross



Finding the way through tribulations with Christ Crucified

“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6.14)

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Introduction

“Journey To The Cross” is a series of meditations reflecting on Jesus’ declaration: *“Whoever does not take up the cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.”* (Matthew 10.38) In this life, each Christian is called to follow Christ on a journey to the cross.

Section I provides a metaphorical means of reflecting on the journey itself. Section II provides some insight into the meaning of the cross in our lives.

May reflection on these pages help us to journey in love of the cross, even to the point where we may say with St. Paul: *“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* (Galatians 6.14)

I The Journey

“Follow Me”

At the start of His public ministry, the Lord called His apostles with the words: “Follow Me”. To follow Him faithfully always includes a share of His cross, with all its tribulations and blessings. The Christian looks beyond the human idea of the cross as an instrument of punishment and death and sees it as a call to love one another and to live a new life.

“Then He said to them all, ‘If any want to become My followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will save it.’” (Luke 9.23-24)

Call of the Cross

The cross is a call to fulfill:
Beyond the bounds of selfishness;
Against the grain of one's own will --
To shrink the self with sheer kindness.

The call is to live love in whole:
To look past one's own want and need,
To reach out to another soul,
With kindness lived by word and deed.

The command is to persevere:
Believing mercy is for all,
Hoping against all angst and fear,
Strengthened by grace to live the call.

The Lord's call is to "follow Me":
He is love lived in perfection;
To learn from Him means faithfully,
To live love by imitation.

With firm resolve, the cross is held;
By grace and faith, love and life meld.

"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
(1 Corinthians 1.18)

Lord, strengthen my heart with a firm resolve to follow You and
live out Your call to love as a faithful disciple. Amen.

The Way

The Lord shows us the way that leads to the cross in His passion.
The way detaches the heart from all that is not of God, such that
the soul may live for God alone. It builds humility as the

purifying light of truth shines on the heart. It strengthens faith as successive trials are endured on the way.

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7.13-14)

Lonely Road

The cross is on a lonely road,
That narrows to a steep incline;
The hiker who carries no load,
Can tread the path with help divine.

All provisions weigh heavily,
And sugars sap the strength to climb;
The bitter herbs found on the way,
Provide what's needed at the time.

A parching thirst dries to the bone.
The heights are arid and austere.
The hiker travels all alone,
In desolation oft severe.

The Lord is the means and the way:
The hiker keeps Him e'er in sight;
The deepest thirst He will allay --
His way is truth; His burden light.

With ev'ry step, keep the Lord near;
He is the strength to persevere.

"He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics." (Mark 6.8-9)

Lord, may Your light guide me on the way to the cross, and may Your grace give me the strength to persevere with every step. Amen.

Strengthening The Heart

The first steps on the journey to the cross buoy the heart with the confidence of a new beginner. Spiritual efforts come easily and consolation is abundant. The Lord's first task is to strengthen the heart and wean it off of its dependencies, so that it may become dependent on Him alone.

"I will lay waste mountains and hills, all their herbage I will dry up; I will turn the rivers into marshes, and the marshes I will dry up. I will lead the blind on their journey; by paths unknown I will guide them. I will turn darkness into light before them, and make crooked ways straight. These things I do for them, and I will not forsake them." (Isaiah 42.15-16)

Into The Wilderness

The heart moves with consolation,
On these first steps of the journey;
Shielded from most tribulation,
Progress appears to move swiftly.

With this first confidence imbued,
God leads the soul through wilderness,
Where little rain and lack of food,
Leave the heart thirsting for solace.

The heart, deprived of former joys,
Finds strength in dependence on God;
The heart's demands quiet their noise --
The path's tougher terrain is trod.

As night descends on wilderness,
The heart loses sight of its way;
Fearing it may fall or transgress,
It waits, helpless, in disarray.

The heart's strengthened in this first test;
It must trust that God knows what's best.

"O God, you are my God -- for You I long! For You my body yearns; for You my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water... When I think of You upon my bed, through the night watches I will recall that You indeed are my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to You; Your right hand upholds me." (Psalm 63.2,7-9)

Lord, be my strength in this confusing and difficult trial. Keep my heart in Your hand, that I may not take it back to return to my old ways. Amen.

Purging The Heart

How many imperfections color the heart with their distortions! How can the willing heart find the means to be corrected and changed? Knowing we cannot do this work ourselves, even in the span of a lifetime, God provides the grace of the night of the soul to cleanse us and transform us.

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51.7,17)

Nightfall

As night descends, worries heighten;
Peace is displaced by vague unease.
Fears of offending God tighten –
Their weight drops the heart to its knees.

No consolation can be found
In psalm or prayer however sought;
The heart remains pressed to the ground –
Dust and dryness remain its lot.

Virtues withdrawn expose weakness;
By grace, humility is grown.
Self-assurance becomes meekness –
The heart was never left alone.

In the stillness of the night air,
A gentle breeze assures the heart:
This purge is both gentle and fair,
As means for old ways to depart.

By night, the heart's cleansed and renewed;
This cross is holiness pursued.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139.23-24)

Lord, may my heart be held tightly in Your hand at this difficult time of letting go of old ways, that I may not offend You. May my soul grow in holiness according to Your will. Amen.

Reviving The Heart

The difficulties of the journey in darkness have left the heart emptied and the soul wounded and worn down. Yet the heart trusts that God will provide healing and peace out of His abundant love. In the stilled silence of deep prayer, God provides the great gift of His life to the soul, reviving it on its way to the Cross.

"Those of steadfast mind You keep in peace – in peace because they trust in You. O Lord, we wait for You; Your name and Your renown are the soul's desire. My soul yearns for You in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks You...O Lord, You will ordain peace for us, for indeed, all that we have done, You have done for us." (Isaiah 3.8b-9,12)

Evening Vigil

As night descends, the heart awaits
The God of peace, with hope and trust.
The soul struggled through narrow gates,
Leaving much behind in the dust.

Here in the dark, the heart attends
The Lord, with all its passions staid.
With humble trust, the soul extends –
Foundations of friendship are laid.

The heart opens up to receive
The Lord, in stillness, listening.
A flow, too subtle to perceive,
Spills in the soul, overflowing.

This flow, simple and delicate,
Fills the soul with a great treasure.
This gift of God, in pure spirit,
Yields life and love beyond measure.

The heart rejoices in the night;
The blunt darkness has bled pure light!

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matthew 13.44)

Lord, open my heart and still my soul to prepare me to receive
Your gift of love. Fill me to overflowing with light and joy and
life! Amen.

II The Message

The Intent of the Cross

The Lord has tailor-made a cross for each of us, custom-fitting it according to our purpose within His will. There is one intention which overrides all our individual differences – to replace our natural selfishness with a new compassion. This compassion flows from Christ, through the heart, and reaches out to one another. It is by way of love that we are gradually transformed into love through the love of Christ.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Him." (Matthew 7.13-14)

Compassion of the Cross

Christ made Himself vulnerable,
As one with all of humankind:
His compassion – universal;
His countenance – gentle and kind.

This love led Him to sacrifice
Himself for all upon the cross;
His own power did not entice –
He willed that not one soul be lost.

This same compassion animates
The hearts of those who truly heed,
With love that would not hesitate,
To lift the heart of one in need.

The heart of God is compassion.
Each soul is precious in His sight;
His love flows through all creation –
Even the cross and the dark night.

Always recall that God is love;
In Him, each soul can rise above!

"The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made." (Psalm 145.8-9)

Lord, help me recall Your compassion and gentle kindness, and may I never lose sight of Your mercy, especially in facing the cold lack of love we so often have for one another. Amen.

To Want What God Wants

So many conflicts and misunderstandings result from our hearts not getting what they want. How often we try the patience of God and of one another in pursuing our own desires at someone else's expense. To do what God wants is to turn from our old ways and to work with Him in doing His will in our day. To make this choice with a firm resolve is to embrace the cross.

"He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.'" (Mark 14.36)

His Will

God is the author of all life;
His word is pregnant with His will.
Beneath the day's events and strife,
His hand is ever-present still.

One's free will is a sacred trust;
The Lord respects what we decide.
How often do our dreams go bust,
Our thoughts conflict, our ways collide!

The Lord's will is the surest way;
In Him, we confidently run.
To vow allegiance is to pray:
"Not my will but Your will be done."

To choose His will is a tough choice:
One's rights and freedoms face a loss;
The heart's desires lose their voice --
This choice is to embrace the cross.

With firm resolve, entrust each day.
Embrace the cross: God's will; God's way.

"...Live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God... let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good." (1 Peter 4.2b,19)

Lord, I entrust the needs of my heart to You, and I choose Your will, believing that You always know what is best and that You will always lead me on the way of truth and light. Amen.

Stripping Off The Old Self

To be prepared for true change is to learn to let go of old ways of thinking and doing. Detachment is the process of letting go of the familiar so that the heart and mind can be opened to learning to live by a new way. In other words, it is, to empty the heart of all that is not of God in order to prepare a place for Him. It is to empty the hands of treasure held and to open them to receive the cross.

"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God... Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)... you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator." (Colossians 3.2,3,5,9b-10)

Letting Go

Detachment is a letting go
Of pleasures and treasures held dear;
The process is painful and slow --
The heart's whole storehouse has to clear.

By grace, the Lord propels the heart
To leave behind all it desires;
With the old ways falling apart,
The lure of sin no longer mires.

He provides ways and means to pry
The heart from what it clings to last;
The cross demands the old ways die --
Left in the dust of all things past.

Though the heart aches with emptiness
And appetites nearly destroyed,
The Lord's actions are pure kindness --
For He Himself will fill the void!

Let go of all the heart's treasure;
The Lord repays beyond measure.

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3.30)

Lord, detach me from all that is not of You, so that I may live for You alone and that You may fill the emptiness of my heart to overflowing. Amen.

Walking In The Light

So often, the way we see and understand our world is tainted by our own misconceptions and prejudices. Our hearts and our relationships with one another are burdened with the hardships caused by this misunderstanding. To live in truth is to let go of these misconceptions and to learn to accept ourselves and one another as we truly are. To see our present circumstances in this same light is to hold onto the cross in the light of truth.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6.22-23)

Cloaked Heart

The heart is cloaked in twisted truths
Of deception and self-defense;
Self-knowledge penetrates and sleuths
The thick layers of false pretense.

The cloak distorts what is perceived;
It sullies what is seen and heard.
The heart is darkened and deceived --
It leaves the soul dank and disturbed.

The heart that's exposed to the light
Will see itself in its true state;
It may turn humble and contrite,
Or choose to shirk all and berate.

The contrite heart is cleansed and healed;
The shroud of sin is slipped away.
The gentle rays of truth revealed
A heart reborn by light of day.

A clean conscience yields a clear sight;
The Lord is the truth and the light.

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" (John 8.12)

Lord, may the Holy Spirit of truth penetrate the depths of my heart and expose all to the light, that I may truly see again and follow You, the light of my life. Amen.

Reigning In The Senses

The natural instincts of the heart and the continuous input of the senses combine to serve up countless opportunities to be drawn into sin. Without a self-discipline that is seasoned, strong, and constant, the heart quickly falters and falls back into its old ways. Learning to persevere, with merciful acceptance of one's own weaknesses, leads to a humble, but resilient self-control.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2.12-13)

Managing the Heart

We are creatures of sight and sound,
Depending on senses to live;
They simply cannot be shut down –
The heart can filter what they give.

The pleasures which senses produce
Give rise to the heart's selfish joy;
To not partake is to cut loose
The heart from bindings that destroy.

The heart detached from its desire,
Striving to live as God would want,
Denies selfish joy and its fire –
Even as instincts goad and taunt.

In striving to filter senses,
The heart's passions will be reigned in;
Urges are corralled in fences
Of self-control – limiting sin.

A managed heart's open and kind;
Disordered hearts are deaf and blind.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51.10)

Lord, grant me the grace of self-control, that my heart may be governed by Your steadfast love and kindness. May the instincts of my heart be purified and freed from their natural tendencies to sin. Amen.

Riding Waves Of Emotion

Emotions rise and fall in the heart like waves on the sea. It can be difficult to preserve one's peace in times of stress as it is so easy to get caught up in the emotion of the moment. Striving to steady the heart in these times with trust in the Lord's unwavering love will strengthen the heart's ability to carry the cross.

"My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to Him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient... Trust in Him, and He will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in Him." (Sirach 2.2-6)

Steadfast Heart

Emotions jar, distress, and churn
The heart that is not held secure;
The truth becomes hard to discern --
A heart that's steadfast will endure.

Some souls struggle and try to cope,
As strong emotions rise and fall;
A steadfast heart's anchored by hope
In the Lord's steadfast love, through all.

A steadfast heart can persevere
Like a sea-wall against the waves:
Preserving peace, yet not austere --
Knowing it is the Lord who saves.

A steadfast heart holds the cross tight,
With a resolve strong and sincere:
Through highs of day and lows of night;
In joy and hope, sadness and fear.

On steadfast hearts, the Lord depends;
Life and virtue are dividends.

"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast...I will give thanks to you, O Lord... For Your steadfast love is higher than the heavens, and Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds." (Psalm 108.1a,3a,4)

Lord, steady my heart in times of joy and sorrow, that I may persevere in Your peace, come what may. Amen.

Why Sacrifice?

To sacrifice is neither to seek glory for oneself, nor punishment for one's own sin, nor pleasure in pain; rather, it is a freewill offering of oneself out of love. An act of sacrifice decreases selfishness and increases our love for God and one another. Though the Lord has already paid the price for our sins in His suffering and death on the cross, suffering continues to have a place in our salvation. In sacrifice, we are sanctified in love.

"And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10.10)

United To The Cross

How often hearts run from the cross
Rather than take its grief and pain;
When eyes can only see the cost,
Grace is discarded with disdain.

To sacrifice is to submit
All selfishness, in offering
Up of oneself, and to permit
The loss of self in suffering.

Only by grace, can souls offer
Themselves sincerely to the Lord;
Prepared in love, they can suffer
With Him – hearts held strong in accord.

Behold the Lamb who takes away
The sins of all who heed His voice;
The cross is the means and the way
To life for all – it is our choice.

With hearts united to the cross,
Old ways are discarded as dross.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12.1)

Christ crucified, call my heart to be united with Yours upon the cross, that my heart may be sanctified in sacrifice for love of You and my fellow travelers on this journey. Amen.

Choosing The Cross

The heart is instinctively opposed to the difficult choices it faces each day. To choose the more difficult and unpleasant option for the benefit of Christ and one's neighbor is to work against the heart's natural, selfish tendencies. This direction sets the heart in motion on the road to freedom from selfishness, ingratitude, and unwillingness to do what God wants.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword... Whoever does not take up the cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 10.34,38b-39)

Losing Self

The heart's natural tendency
Is to oppose the Lord's command;
The cross is the self's enemy --
The Lord waits, knocking, cross in hand.

The heart can be trained to prefer
The cross over its selfishness;
To face the cross is to suffer
The loss of self and its excess.

Choose what the heart renounces first:
The difficult and unpleasant;
The troublesome and what seems worst --
This leaves it dry and discontent.

Choose what the Lord wants for His sake;
Strive for a heart emptied and free.
A thirst for the Lord will awake;
The cross will be embraced fully.

The heart that loses self succeeds;
And follows where'er the Lord leads.

"If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice...Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power and sees everything; His eyes are on those who fear him, and He knows every human action. He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and He has not given anyone permission to sin." (Sirach 15.15,17-20)

Lord, grant me the grace to oppose the selfish tendencies of my heart, that I may embrace the cross with joy in order to serve You and my neighbor. Amen.

Boundless Mercy

The Mercy of God knows no bounds, except for the heart which refuses to receive the gift of His forgiveness. Even from the cross, the dying Jesus called on His Father to forgive those who were killing Him. If we have received such a marvelous gift from the Lord, how can our hearts be stingy in forgiving our brother or sister?

"When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' " (Luke 23.33-34)

Mercy Outpoured

The heart of one in sin is bound
With the burdens of slavery;
The heart of one confessed has found
The awesome wealth of God's mercy.

This wealth is an inheritance
Meant to be squandered far and wide;
As we forgive any offence
Peace and freedom come to abide.

Forgiveness is a letting go
Of all that binds the will to love;
The forgiven will come to know
This priceless grace flows from above.

The good thief teaches us clearly
A contrite heart and will suffice:
He asked: "Jesus, remember me";
The Lord granted him paradise.

"Father, forgive! They do not know."
From the cross, grace and mercy flow.

"We indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" (Luke 23:41-43)

Lord, free my heart from all that the judgments and hard feelings that keep me from forgiving. May all souls come to know the awesome riches of Your mercy. Amen.

Sustaining Hope

Without hope, who could endure the sufferings of this life? In hope, God provides the grace and means to receive His mercy fully. Hope is the assurance of eternal life.

"...suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not

disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us... God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by His blood, will we be saved through Him." (Romans 4.3b-5,8-9a)

Mercy's Guarantee

A close encounter of the cross
Crumple the heart's complacency.
The humbled heart accepts its loss --
Grace surges in adversity.

By grace, the soul is lifted up,
In union with the Crucified;
They drink the dregs of the same cup --
Salvation will not be denied.

This hope sustains the striving soul:
Courage to rise after each fall,
Anchor for the heart's self-control,
Acceptance of what may befall.

In hope: mercy's fully received,
The soul's most fatal wounds are healed,
Fear is conquered; faith is believed,
The triumph of the cross revealed.

For humbled hearts, hope is secure.
By Christ's own cross, victory's sure!

"Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved" (Romans 8.23-24a)

Lord, sustain my heart with a hope that never waivers. May I always trust in Your promise of paradise to the good thief which is my soul. Amen.

Darkness Before The Dawn

The darkest hour befalls the soul near death, be it dying to self in the night of the soul or in the final hour of this life. All that the soul has known, possessed, or desired must be stripped away so that the soul may exist for God alone. From this hour of greatest abandonment flows the font of eternal life.

“When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15.33-34)

At The Last Hour

How ominous the cross appears
At the last hour -- dark so deep!
The heart's pierced through as the time nears --
The flesh fades towards final sleep.

The soul is stretched between extremes
Of light and dark; of joy and dread.
The weight of death, with heavy beams,
Burdens the flesh and heart like lead.

In this darkness, only faith's light
Can guide the will towards the way;
Though battles rage on through this night,
Hope shields the soul throughout the fray.

All that was held is left behind;
The soul now doubts all it has known;
Spirit and flesh become untwined --
The soul exists for God alone.

The soul slips from its earthen skin;
Eternity bursts from within.

"Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' "
(Mark 15.37-39)

Lord Jesus, accept the gift of my soul into Your hands at the hour of my death, so that You may be all I know and love and live for all eternity. Amen.

References

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