

## **THE CRUCIFIED LIFE**

**Luke 23:26–34**

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Luke 23:26–34 (NIV)

“As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, “Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!” Then they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?’ Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.”

To this Scripture I add two brief sentences, one from the Lord himself earlier in His ministry, in Luke 9:23, “If any man or any person would come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.” Then a statement from Paul in Galatians 5:24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”

This morning, as we look at the theme “The Crucified Life,” we not only want to look at the crucifixion of Jesus, we want to see, out of His life, what can also be applied to our own. He lived the crucified life but He also calls us as His followers to likewise take up our cross daily, to live crucified with Him.

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I'm the kind of person that likes to avoid pain. I'm not into pain. I'm not into physical pain. I'm not into psychological pain. I'm not into spiritual pain. Get me away from pain, please, if you can. I was in the South Pacific last year to speak at a missionaries' retreat, and at the end of June, I was getting ready to leave. It was my last night in the Fiji Islands. Our flight left late, at dinner time. For dinner that last evening, I was at a restaurant. It was outdoors, right on the beach. We came to our table right at sunset. The lamplighters had just come and lit all the lamps down that stretch of the private beach. The palm trees were gently swaying in the breeze. A full moon came up and lit the bay and silhouetted the sail ships in the harbor. It was a scene straight out of South Pacific. I thought, "What a great moment in life!"

But I began to sense quickly that, while everything outside looked very peaceful, there was annoyance taking place around my ankles. Within 10 minutes, I had been darted by a sharp piercing something, or another 15 to 20 times. The pain finally became real enough that I looked down and discovered that the mosquitoes had lit upon me and were eating me up alive. Here was this beautiful meal in the South Pacific destroyed by a bunch of pesky mosquitoes.

If you ask me today, "Do you want to go back to the South Pacific?" It may sound romantic, but to me it's third world, it's poverty and it's mosquitoes. Just get me away from the pain, unless, when you buy my ticket you send me with some mosquito repellent. I'll just go to any lengths to avoid pain, even if I have to forgo some pleasure. I'd rather forgo the pleasure than experience the pain.

I'm just saying that by way of preface. When I give a title like "The Crucified Life," I can just sense that, spiritually and mentally and psychologically, we all get a frown on our face and start looking serious. It is a serious subject, but I've never been much attracted to sermons that have been preached on the crucified life that have dumped all kinds of stuff on me that I wasn't able to

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handle. It looked to me that whatever the crucified life was it was so joyless and so filled with duty and so filled with guilt that I could never live it anyway.

I like the cross better as a piece of jewelry. Or as a nice religious symbol. Take the cross and sand it down and lacquer it and make it comfortable. For Jesus, in our culture to say, “Take up your cross daily and follow Me.” it would fit better to say, “Go to the electric chair daily and follow Me.” Because that’s what “Take up the cross” meant when He first said it.

Can you imagine coming to church—outside we have this wooden cross on our lawn and it’s such a symbol of the gospel—can you imagine that instead of a wooden cross we had a pole coming out of the ground and on top of the pole, for our religious symbol, we had an electric chair with a cord dangling and with straps hanging down? And one of your friends says, “Where are you going to church today?” and you say, “I’m going to the church of the holy electric chair.” That just doesn’t sail within our culture.

But the cross was a means of execution, just like the electric chair is. To put it simply—a cross is where you die. That’s its purpose. It has no other purpose. Jesus could have gotten out of the cross had He chosen to step outside His Father’s will. And likewise, the cross for us represents any moment in life in which we are being forced to choose between our way and His way; in which we are being forced to choose between our feelings and our responsibility; in which we are being forced to choose between what’s right and what’s wrong; between impulse and responsibility. The cross is that obligation that the Lord lays upon us as His disciple to say, “If you weren’t My disciple, then you wouldn’t have to make this choice, because you wouldn’t care and it wouldn’t matter and you wouldn’t know who God is. But now that you know Me, this choice, this responsibility is laid upon you. It will not always be convenient to be My disciple. It will not always be easy. It will not always feel good. Take up your cross daily and follow Me.”

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In the little passage of Scripture that we have just read, there are four things about the crucified life that are exemplified by our Lord for us.

### **I. The first one is that, simply, the crucified life was something He intended to live.**

The opening of our Scripture today says, “As they led Him away,” giving the impression that other people were forcing the crucifixion on Him. But we know, as a point of fact, that they would not have led Him away had He not determined to go to the cross. The Via Delarosa—the way of the cross. The way of sorrows was something that began, not when He left Pilate’s judgment hall to be paraded through the streets and alleys by the Romans with a soldier going in front of Him, bearing the title of His crime on a placard as they made their way through the crowd. The Via Delarosa did not begin at Pilate’s judgment hall, it began in eternity past. The lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It began thirty years earlier, when as a baby, He was brought to Jerusalem by His mother and His stepfather and the prophet Simeon held Him in his arms and said, “This child will be the child that is spoken against.” The Via Delarosa, the way of the cross, was something that is articulated in Jesus’ public ministry again and again when He says, “I must go to Jerusalem.” “The Son of Man will lay down His life.” “The Lord set His face to go to Jerusalem.” It was a matter, not of impulse; it was a matter of intention.

The cross for Jesus was not an accident. In a very real sense, Jesus cannot even be called a victim because a victim has no choice in the matter. Peter, in preaching on the Day of Pentecost, says, “The death of Jesus resulted from the evil counsel of men and the determined foreknowledge of God.” God had a hand in it and Jesus chose the cross willingly.

This, therefore, is applicable to us when we are at junctures in our life when we’re being called upon to follow the Lord or follow ourselves. When we’re being called to follow what’s easy and convenient versus what is right and responsible. It must be something that we intend to do.

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Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, becoming Christian, is more than being manipulated out of your seat to make a call at an altar to give your life to Christ. It is an intention of your heart which you are determined to follow through. “I have decided to follow Jesus. No tuning back.” If we don’t do this willingly, we’re going to be like the little boy who was disciplined by his parents. He was told to go sit in the corner. He went with a lot of tears in his eyes and a lot of pout in his cheeks. He said to his parents, as he was sitting there, “I may be sitting down on the outside but I’m sanding up on the inside.”

Jesus not only intended to go to the cross, but He did it willingly and gladly. Which leads us really to the second aspect of the crucified life. The cross is something we intend to do and...

### **II. The crucified life can be a winsome life.**

It can be an attractive life. Good can come from it. In the particular passage that I read, there is a marvelous example of how Jesus’ life, even on the way to the cross, reaches out and changes a human being dramatically. That man is Simon of Cyrene. I don’t know if it’s ever struck you that the people around Jesus that were not His disciples were often unnamed. There are a lot of unnamed people in the Gospels. There, in fact, are very few bystanders that are given a specific name, even on the way to the cross, for example, the daughters of Jerusalem are unnamed. The soldiers who crucified him are unnamed. The criminals crucified with Him are unnamed. Only one of the people surrounding Him at this point is given a name—Simon of Cyrene. The reason he was given a name is that, evidently, this person who bore His cross after he bore it simply didn’t fade into the woodwork. Nobody would have known that he was the one to bear His cross because the disciples weren’t even present. They had fled into hiding. The way that his name got into the text was that, somehow, he became a believer and he became known within the Christian community and gave his testimony in many different meetings of the Early Church. And he’d

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probably, I would think, at the very beginning say, “I first met Jesus on the road to Calvary. I bore His cross.”

You say, “How can you be sure that that’s the case?” If you look at Mark’s account of the crucifixion, you will find that Mark not only gives us Simon’s name, but he tells us that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Why, when you’re giving details of the crucifixion, would you take time to tell about a man and not only tell his name but tell who his sons were, unless the people that you’re writing to had concrete knowledge of who these people were. Mark, writing to the Roman believers, identifies him—Simon of Cyrene—as the father of Alexander and Rufus, which brings us to the conclusion that Alexander and Rufus were now in Rome and were members of the Roman church. And sure enough, when Paul writes to the Romans in Romans 15 he says, “Greet Rufus and his mother, who is also my mother.” So the full story is that somewhere in the thirty years after carrying the cross of Christ, Simon of Cyrene died, maybe he’d already moved his family to Rome. He leaves behind a widow who becomes a great help to the apostle Paul, and he leaves behind two sons. He was from Cyrene, which is on the modern map Tripoli-Lybia. He was not, however, a Lybian. He was not an Arab. He was a Jew of the Dispersion. Either that or he was in the community of Cyrenians who lived in Jerusalem who belonged to a synagogue that Stephen preached in in Acts 6:8.

The impression from the text is that he was a pilgrim from Cyrene, because he was coming in from the country. Maybe it was his first time in Jerusalem. And maybe all of his life he’d been looking forward to this pilgrimage and now, the day before the high holy day, the day the Lord was crucified, he’s coming into town and a Roman soldier, as was the soldier’s legal right, lays the flat end of his spear on this man’s shoulder, pressing him into duty, and forces him to carry a cross, staggering under the weight of it, to a place of execution. Enduring the taunts and the

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spittle and the anger and the sweat of the moment. How do you think he felt when he got home that night? His parents said, “How did your day go?” “A terrible day. A day I looked forward to in my life, but I had to bear somebody’s cross.”

Or did, in fact, Jesus so radically reach him that when he came home that day he said, “I met a person on His way to death that was unlike anyone I have ever met.” I think it was the latter case. Simon, somehow, saw in Jesus that perfect representative of manhood that attracted him and galvanized him and reached him.

I think that that same kind of phenomenon occurs any time in life we choose to focus on the good that comes out of trial and out of crucifixion. Our focus must not simply be on the cross itself. It’s what’s springing out of the road to the cross and out of the cross. Indeed, out of Jesus’ pilgrimage to the cross, there comes a convert. And may that be occurring to us. If you’re walking a Calvary road today in your life, may—in the midst of the crushing of the flower of your life—there be some kind of sweet aroma that the apostle Paul refers to. It becomes a victory to the Lord God rather than a defeat.

There was winsomeness in the life of Jesus as He went to be crucified.

**III. The third quality of the crucified life that we see in Jesus is that it is remarkably free of self-pity.**

It’s not only a life that is lived intentionally and not only a life that is winsome but it is a life that is remarkably free of self-pity. You say, “How do you get that?” I look at Jesus’ encounter with the daughters of Jerusalem. Isn’t that an intriguing phrase? We could have some kind of society in this church called the “Daughters of Jerusalem.” I like that. Like the Order of Saint Andrew or something.

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Geographical references are very important to understand, biblically and geographically, what's happening. When Jesus came into the city at the beginning of Holy Week, it was a Galilean crowd, no doubt, who proclaimed Him as King. They were His partisans from the north. When He was crucified, it was probably a Judean Jerusalemite crowd that yelled, "Crucify Him!" Jerusalem was never really for Him. But in Jerusalem He had His followers and they are represented here. The daughters of Jerusalem, wailing and weeping for Him. What does Jesus do in this moment? He does not say to them, "Look at what I'm doing for you. I'm going to the cross to die for you." Nor does He call attention to His pain. Nor does He drop bits of information on the terror He had faced that preceding evening. Nor is He saying, "I don't deserve to be treated this way."

You're probably a lot like me. We're not always so calm and collected when we're passing through emotional or physical pain. But Jesus was calm and collected and He had this marvelous ability to get outside of His own pain and bear the pain of someone else. He literally, at that moment, turned aside any attempt to engender any pity heaped upon Him. Instead He pitied those who attempted to solace Him. Remarkable!

I know that because, when we are hurting in life, the hardest thing to do is to somehow get out of our hurt and care about somebody other than ourselves. Jesus shows us what the crucified life is—putting to death the human passions and desires by being concerned for these daughters of Jerusalem.

He says some remarkable things to them, like a phrase that probably sails right past us because it's so poetic. "If they do this when the wood is green, what will they do when it's dry?" (Luke 23:31). And what He is doing in that moment is saying that He's the green tree—and you know if you're building a fire you don't go out and gather green wood that's filled with moisture. He's

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saying, “If in a day like today, when there is no rebellion and sedition going on in the country, the Romans at the instigation of the Jewish leadership are putting to death an innocent man, can you imagine what is going to happen when there is true rebellion and sedition in the country? Can you imagine, if the Romans are doing this to an innocent man, what they are going to do to people who foment rebellion against them?” He’s looking down the road forty years, when there will be a devastation in Jerusalem.

He knows that within Judaic life one of the great things that people look forward to is having lots of children—Psalms 127 says that. But He says, “In that day, ladies, the person who never bore a child will be called blessed.” Why is that so? Because, you see, when you’re going through suffering, you can endure it yourself, but when you see your kids going through it, it’s twice as bad. So blessed are those who in that day of trouble will have never borne children, because they will be spared from the grief of seeing their children suffer. And He says, “In that day, you won’t be looking to the mountains as a safety hideout or a place of protection. Things will be so bad that you’ll want to get crushed instead.”

And all through that speech to the daughters of Jerusalem, He is reaching out to their pain, which they don’t even realize is going to happen to them as He speaks. He’s modeling this life that is remarkably free from self-pity, which transcends His own hurts to enter into another person’s hurt. That’s what living a crucified life is all about.

**IV. It seems to me that a fourth quality that the Lord demonstrates of a crucified life is that a crucified life is one in which forgiveness is flowing and is being given freely.**

Jesus is brought to the Place of the Skull. That’s what it’s called in the Gospel of Luke. We also refer to that place as Golgotha. And we refer to it as Calvary. It’s interesting that those three words—“skull,” “Golgotha” and “Calvary,” all mean the same thing. But they’re from three

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different languages. Skull is from the Greek word *cranion*. Golgotha is from the Hebrew or the Aramaic—same meaning. “Calvary” is from the Latin *calvaria*—“skull.” He was brought to Calvary. He was brought to Golgotha. He was brought to the Place of the Skull.

Now, the specific spot where Jesus was brought is in doubt today. If you’re in Jerusalem, you can go to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and there will be people who say, “It was here.” If you go outside the Damascus gate, outside the present city wall to what is called “Gordon’s Calvary”—named after General Gordon, because he spotted the hill that had the shape of the skull—it’s clearly discernible when you’re there that that is another possible sight, because nearby is a garden and a first-century tomb.

But the exact sight is probably not what’s important today. In fact, most of our artistic ideas of Calvary are probably incorrect. I’ve often pictured Jesus being crucified on top of a rounded mountain—He’s up there with the two criminals, one on His right and one on His left, and everybody is way down, scores of feet, a hundred feet—and He’s just up there alone. Actually, since He was crucified in a public place, where there were passers by, this means He was crucified alongside a busy road. And the Gospels never refer to Calvary as a hill. We know, from the way the Romans crucified,, that His feet would not have been more than two or three feet above the ground. So it was a place where people could go right up and talk to Him and spit on Him. Or He could talk to them. It was a public place.

If you’re at Gordon’s Calvary today, when you look out over, there is, on the right hand side, one of the busier places in Jerusalem. It’s right there at the base of Calvary. It’s the Arab bus station. The central bus station. There are people coming to and fro. It’s smelly, smoky, exhaust fume given by buses that are in and out of that place. Horns beeping, day in and day out. You’re trying to get some peace of mind by waiting at Calvary and all you can hear and smell are the buses.

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There's even been an attempt to buy that bus station in order to turn it into a Christian park where you can go meditate. My personal opinion is they ought to keep the bus station there. Because that's what Calvary was really like. It was a busy place. It was a place for cynics. It was a place for people that weren't interested in what was going on at the crucifixion. It was the way life really is. He was crucified and people were going about their daily business and could care less. The bus station reminds me of all those things. He was brought to Calvary and He was crucified.

The cross was a horrible means of death. The prisoner was fastened to the cross with ropes or nails, depending on how long he was going to be left on the cross. Ropes—days. Nails—part of a day. At the most two days. Jesus was nailed to the cross. The crucified person died of exposure or asphyxia or loss of blood. Most of the time, asphyxia. Jesus' hands were nailed as were, most likely, His feet. In Luke 24, He refers to both, "See My hands and My feet."

When He was laid on the cross, there was a horn-like projection on the main beam, where the crucified one was straddled when the cross was erected. That took most of his weight and stopped the flesh from tearing away from the nails. There's been a recent archeological discovery of a first century man crucified about the same time as Jesus. The skeleton shows that the legs were bent and twisted, and then fastened to the cross in a contorted way, by a single nail through the heels. Such contortion of the body would have added to the agony. It was a slow and awful death.

The Gospels do not report the details of the suffering of Jesus. They don't report of the beam being dropped into the ground. They don't report the physical agony, almost as if it's too painful to remember or also, because they want to avoid the sensationalism of describing the gruesome

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details. But it was there on a cross that Jesus died. Of all the tens of thousands of people whom the Romans killed, there is one cross we remember. It is His.

To the insult of the crucifixion it was added that the soldiers divided His clothes as He was dying. His honor has been taken from Him, His followers have left Him, His life is ebbing away and now even His possessions are gone to strangers.

What is His reaction? Is His reaction one of crying out in pain? Is it one of saying, “I’ll get even with you for what you’re doing to Me!” Or is it, indeed, as the Gospel says, His first words from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they’re doing.”

Some people think that the only people Jesus was forgiving in that moment were the soldiers. They were the only ones around that didn’t know what they were doing. But with Peter, Acts 3:17 lets us know that when Jesus expressed that word of forgiveness, He was not only forgiving the soldiers, He was forgiving those who had been the most responsible for His death—the religious leadership that had indicted and pursued Him wickedly and falsely to the cross. Peter says the rulers did this in ignorance. In ignorance? It looked like a cold-blooded murder and like a miscarriage of justice. But Peter, who knew the Old Testament, like the Lord, knows that in the Old Testament there were two kinds of sins. Sins of the high hand and sins of ignorance.

A sin of the “high hand,” as it is called, we call it first-degree, premeditated murder; for which, in the Old Testament system, there was no sacrifice allowed. There was no city of refuge that could hold you if you fled to it. If you committed first-degree, premeditated murder, that was a sin of the high hand and there was no atonement in the Old Testament system. If you committed second-degree murder or manslaughter, a non-intentional killing, then it was forgivable. Jesus takes this sin of the high hand, first-degree premeditated murder against Him and says, “I’m

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willing to treat it as a sin of ignorance. It is covered under the atonement. It can be forgiven.”

And Peter picks that up. “All sins may be forgiven man.”

What does forgiveness involve? Forgiveness really involves three things.

**A.** Forgiveness is unilateral. It doesn’t wait to be asked. Jesus on the cross is not asked by anybody for forgiveness. But before He is even asked, the forgiveness is issued forth from Him. He has always issued out a general statement of amnesty and says, “Whoever wants it can have it. Forgiveness is already given.”

If there are bad feelings between you and another person, as a Christian, you have the responsibility—if you’re going to live the crucified life—not to wait for them to come and ask you to forgive them. You have responsibility, as a Christian, of giving them forgiveness before they’ve even asked. Just forgive them. They will not appropriate that forgiveness in their own life—it will not become a part of their own experience—until they receive it as an act and decision of their own. But your responsibility in living the Christian life is to give it.

**B.** The second aspect of forgiveness on the cross is that forgiveness is willing to drop all charges. There were a lot of charges that could be brought against the people that crucified Jesus. When He says, “Forgive them,” He’s saying, “If you’ll agree to the terms, all charges are dropped.” Again, the person against whom the charges are dropped must be willing to agree to that in order to benefit from it.

**C.** Then the third thing about forgiveness is that forgiveness is willing to pay the bill. And that’s what Jesus does on the cross when He says “Father, forgive them.” He’s bearing the weight. He’s picking up the tab. He’s paying for the sin of the whole world. Forgiveness pays the bill. If you come over to my home and you break something expensive, if I forgive you for that, then you don’t have to pay the bill. I say, “I forgive you.” That means I pay the bill. I get it fixed or I

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replace it. You don't have to do anything—except be forgiven. Except say, “I receive the forgiveness.”

Jesus, on the cross, picks up the tab, picks up the bill for all your sin and all my sin and the sin of the whole world.

This last week, in the *Orange County Register*, there was a story about a superior court judge in Orange County who handed down a second-degree murder sentence on a former star athlete in high school. He was being chased by the police, several months ago, and he got to traveling about a hundred miles an hour. The police were trying to apprehend him for a suspected cocaine transaction. He was driving down the Santa Ana Freeway and took the Lincoln off-ramp, barreling along about a hundred miles an hour and he ran right into a Volkswagen. The driver was immediately killed in the wreck and the other emerged unscathed. These last few weeks, he's been on trial in the superior court in Orange County for second-degree murder. At the sentencing time this past Monday, he stood before the judge and was permitted to give comments before sentencing. He turned to the other driver's parents, who were present in the courtroom, and he said to them, “Please find room in your heart to forgive me. I apologize for being the cause of death of your son. I want you to know and understand it wasn't something I did deliberately.”

The paper didn't say whether the parents forgave him or not. But I thought, as I read that, “I wonder what I would say if we were the parents. If somebody killed my George Paul or my Evangeline. I would find it very, very difficult to forgive.” It's easy to talk about forgiveness. It's very difficult to do. One needs special help from God to do it.

Jesus forgives those who crucify Him. It's interesting what the Superior Court judge said in that trial. He said to him, very sternly and very succinctly, “It is not the function of the court to

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forgive,” and he sentenced him for fifteen years to life imprisonment. Cold, penetrating words. I thought, “He’s a judge and he’s right.” When you’re in court, it’s not the function of the court, it’s not the function of the judicial system, to forgive. It’s the function of the judicial system to pass sentence.

Jesus, in His earthly life, made us aware that we are all headed for a rendezvous in the court of God. We will one day stand before God in the flesh, and it is not the function of that court then to forgive. When we are in that moment, it is the function of the court to pass sentence. To either declare “guilty” or “not guilty.” That’s what makes the cross necessary, that’s why Jesus came. Because the verdict in that day is going against us. It is not the function of the court to forgive. But in His earthly life and death, Jesus says, “You can settle before that day. You can settle out of court the debt you owe God and the sin that mars your life.” So He says, “Father, forgive them.” And all who will receive that forgiveness are forgiven.

These are the dimensions of the crucified life. The dimensions we see illustrated in the Lord. These dimensions cause us, in our own life, to ask these questions. Is crucifying my sinful human nature something that I intend to do? Is there a winsomeness in my suffering? Am I becoming free of self-pity? And do I continue to give forgiveness?

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Lord, we want to say carefully today, and meaningfully, that we want to be like You. None of us, perhaps, will ever face execution as did You. Especially the execution of a cross. But all of us do face painful moments in life in which we are confronted with choices that cause us difficulty. There are moments that we think we could do things that would cause us less pain and less anxiety and less stress if we just give free reign to how we feel about a matter. Then it is, in those moments, that we come to You and see again who You are and who we are in You. And

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that You call us to pick up our cross daily, because You know that we just don't make this decision once and then sit on it; but, on a regular basis, we are called—because life is ongoing—to make choices, whether we will continue to follow You and do things Your way, or do things without You and do them our way. So Lord, give us the strength and the power that only the Holy Spirit can impart to live for You. In those moments in life when we likewise are being called to take up our cross and follow You. Let our service to You, Lord, not be something that is stimulated by an emotional response. May it be deeper than that. May it be deeply rooted in our being. May there be a winsomeness about any suffering in our life. Friends here today, in this service, are suffering physically or suffering psychologically or suffering with stress and relationships. Lord, those are painful things for us to experience. But help us, Lord, to reach out and believe You to work the good in our lives in those moments and may some resurrection life be occurring in the midst of our own personal suffering. Help us, Lord, to become free from self-pity and truly enter the hurt of another. And let us always, Lord, give forgiveness; even seventy times seven, as You have taught us. We pray these things in Your name, through Christ. Amen.