

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS:



Forgiveness. Repentance. Suffering. and Joy¹



CHRIST COMMUNITY
CHURCH
Changed Hearts. Changed Lives. Changed Community.

¹ Cover Art: "Cumberland 22, 2007" by Jack Spencer

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS:

Forgiveness. Repentance. Suffering. and Joy

EPIGRAPH

“The cross (in Roman crucifixions) was thus a symbol of absoluteness and totality, and it retains both senses used by Jesus. The cross signified a total claim on life, a claim that ‘daily’ (v. 23) must be accepted in the lives of Jesus’ followers. Only Luke introduces the qualification ‘daily,’ which expands the connotation of the cross from physical martyrdom to the metaphor of daily self-denial. The inclusion of ‘daily’ in v. 23 changes the saying of Jesus from a final act of discipleship fulfilled in physical death to the first and repeated act of discipleship fulfilled in daily obedience to the claim of Jesus on one’s life.”²

James R. Edwards **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 275.

INTRODUCTION

What is the main goal of life between the Now and the Not Yet for us as Christians? We've been granted eternal life at peace with God in union with Christ through His death and resurrection. What then is left to accomplish through discipleship in Jesus? How we answer this question determines how we cultivate the various resources that have been entrusted to us. We will seek to answer this question through **Luke 9:23-27** where Jesus calls us to deny ourselves daily and take up our crosses to follow Him. Our focus will be on four ways in which we are called more specifically to do this as Christ's disciples: forgiveness, repentance, suffering, and joy.

Even a cursory survey of New Testament passages leads us to conclude that the point of discipleship is to transform us into the image of Christ. Consider **Romans 8:29**: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." Paul declares that God conforms us to Jesus's image to exalt Him. The phrasing "to be conformed" indicates that this unfolds as a process over time (which we refer to as sanctification). In **Ephesians 4:17-24**, Paul calls believers to turn from their former life of sin and turn to their new identity in "the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." The discipleship process requires engagement in putting off sin and putting on Christ-likeness in the power of the Holy Spirit in union with Jesus as detailed in **Colossians 3**. However, this process often frustrates our expectations. As Paul E. Miller rightly observes, "We much prefer one-time miracles, not the need for an ongoing miracle of a humble heart, but our ever-present flesh requires an ever-present solution: dying and rising with Jesus."³ We would rather just *be* without a process instead of *becoming* a disciple formed into the Christ's image, which is the same offer Satan made to Adam and Eve that led to the Fall.

Jesus makes it clear that discipleship will be an ongoing process of becoming like Him when he declares in **Luke 9:23**, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."⁴ To come after Jesus alludes to His going before us as the

³ Paul E. Miller, *J-Curve : Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 104.

⁴ Parallel passages occur in **Matthew 16:24-28** and **Mark 8:34-9:1**. Luke 9:23 uniquely includes the call to take up one's cross *daily*.

firstborn from the dead as Paul writes in **Romans 8:29** and **Colossians 1:15-20**. His journey through death to resurrection becomes a pattern of discipleship made fruitful by His having gone first. Jesus calls all His disciples to follow this pattern daily by mortifying ourselves as the center of the universe and taking up the weight of our redemption to vivify Christ's redemption in our lives. Just as we want to be instead of becoming, we also don't want to submit to a Suffering Servant or a Crucified King. We want a benevolent benefactor who protects us from need and suffering or a vengeful warrior who judges those who don't look or think like us. Michael J. Gorman warns us of this as he writes, "By neglecting the story and confession of Jesus as universal Lord, the Lord who rules as the Suffering Servant, the church will substitute the universal Lord for a tribal deity and the Suffering Servant for a conquering king."⁵ This distorted desire deforms us from Christ's image leaving us less than human in many ways.

To experience life more abundant, we must follow Jesus in the way that He has laid out for us. We must daily deny our own sinful desires, marred identities, and exaltations of self. Timothy Keller describes this as "...not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.... True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, ever conversation with myself."⁶ This allows us to then take up the redemptive yoke that Jesus has placed upon us, for it is lighter than the burdens of our ego, guilt, and shame. As a result of God having first loved us, we can rest ourselves safely in Christ so as to carry out the providential opportunities to love those in our spheres of influence. Gorman summarizes this reality beautifully: "Paul was nothing if not someone overwhelmed by the love of God.... Divine love experienced had to become divine love expressed."⁷ He further states, "Love, then, is the evidence (and, by implication, the test) of the presence of Christ by his Spirit in a person or community."⁸ As we defined it in our sermon series on **1 Corinthians 13**, love is willingly and humbly giving ourselves for someone else's true good. Thus, love must be the firm foundation for our discipleship and its resultant actions. To try to take up our crosses for any other reason would crush us.

⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 130.

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2012), 32.

⁷ Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 2021), 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

Jesus calls us to daily deny ourselves and take up our crosses to join Him in proclaiming in word and deed His inbreaking kingdom. As Gorman describes it, “the cross of Christ reveals a missional, justifying, justice-making God and creates a missional, justified, justice-making people.”⁹ As God’s image bearers, we are to display His righteous character as declared in **Exodus 34:6-7** for His glory, our joy, and the life of the world. We serve as ambassadors of this glorious reconciliation that we have received. Gorman writes, “To participate in Christ is both to benefit from God’s mission of liberation and reconciliation and to bear witness to the divine mission – thus furthering it – by becoming a faithful embodiment of it.”¹⁰ The call to take up our crosses and follow Jesus has historical and eternal implications for us and for those in our spheres of influence.

As further evidence of God’s grace and mercy, Jesus provides everything we could possibly need to obey His call. These same resources served to help Him obey God’s will as He journeyed to the cross. As Gorman reflects, “We are called to follow in Jesus’s steps, which means we should make use of the same resources that he did.”¹¹

The first provision for Jesus and for us is the Holy Spirit. As recorded in the Gospels, Jesus’s earthly ministry in proclaiming the Kingdom was inaugurated at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on Him as the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” Bruce A. Ware states, “The very resource of the Holy Spirit empowerment granted to Jesus for his life of obedience and faithfulness to the Father is now granted to Jesus’s disciples as they carry forward the message of Christ, living lives of obedience to Christ, all in the power of the Spirit.”¹² We need the Holy Spirit to convict us of what needs to be mortified and what ought to be vivified in our words and deeds. For us to know how to exalt Jesus, we will need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to apply the balm of the Gospel to and through us.

Jesus’s second gift to us to aid us in our calling to take up our cross is His example in depending on the means of grace. Before He died for us, He prayed regularly for us. He continues this intercessory work from the right hand of the Father per **Hebrews 7:25**. God’s

⁹ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 88.

¹² Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 39.

Word saturated His words and deeds; God's promises sustained Him in His humiliation on our behalf. As Ware writes, "... (Jesus) utilized all of the resources given to him in his humanity. He loved and meditated on God's Word...; he prayed to his Father; he trusted in the wisdom and rightness of his Father's will and Word; and, very significantly, he relied on the supernatural power of the Spirit to strengthen him to do all that he was called upon to do."¹³ Jesus's example of depending on the means of grace to take up His cross helps us to see their importance to us taking up our crosses of lesser gravity and weight.

The third resource that Jesus utilized and provides for us in our earthly pilgrimage is the communion of the saints. He didn't go it alone (though it was often lonely), and neither should we. As He confessed in **John 14:12-14**, the community around Him and those who follow Him will do greater works than He could in His humanity. Gorman describes Paul's understanding of the role of community as "a deep participation in Christ, especially in his death, that is shared with other believers and that comes to fruition in concrete practices of sacrificial, generous, self-giving love and even suffering."¹⁴ The gracious gift of community keeps us from having to take up our crosses and go it alone as ragged individualists (as opposed to the rugged kind).

These gifts aid us in the various aspects of daily denying ourselves and taking up our crosses and will be assumed as necessary for each aspect. We will specifically explore four parts: forgiveness, repentance, suffering, and joy. For forgiveness and repentance, we will engage with various passages from Jesus on both. For suffering and joy, we will wrestle with Paul's example on both. Our hope is to grow as disciples of the Suffering Servant and the Crucified King. According to Paul E. Miller, "Maturity comes when we begin to look like a God who reveals himself in the humiliation of the cross."¹⁵

¹³ Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 84.

¹⁴ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 31.

¹⁵ Paul E. Miller, *J-Curve*, 258.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS SUMMARY

WORKING DEFINITION: The daily prayerful mortification of sinful selfishness and vivification of Jesus’s image in your words and deeds for the greater good of others through your union with Him.

WHAT IT ISN’T AND DOESN’T INCLUDE:

- Personal struggles because of the general strain of life in a fallen world or personal sinfulness or weakness
- Challenging circumstances or people that don’t include persecution because of your union with Christ
- The denial of mere desires or material things
- A hatred of yourself
- A forsaking of the ordinary
- Only extreme acts that could lead to martyrdom
- An opportunity for self-branding and platforming

WHAT IT INCLUDES:

- Prayer
 - Forgiveness
 - Repentance
 - Suffering
 - Joy
-

We will begin with forgiveness because “...forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian message....”¹⁶ Remember that our inauguration into the Kingdom begins with God’s forgiveness. It sets the standard for how we primarily serve as His ambassadors of reconciliation. We are to mortify our hatred and desire for selfish revenge daily and take up the cross of forgiveness proclaimed to both our friends and enemies. Keller writes, “The sign that you have been forgiven is a heightened capacity for love, for gift giving, and for forgiving others. A lack of a sense of being forgiven leads to a lesser ability – or an inability – to extend grace or grant forgiveness to others.”¹⁷ Love serves as foundational to forgiveness.

¹⁶ Timothy Keller, *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* (New York: Viking, 2022), 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

Critical to growing in forgiveness is to remember who we were without it: enemies of and outsiders to the Kingdom. Gorman helpfully reminds us that "...the incarnation and death of Jesus were undertaken as an act of love toward 'outsiders,' to those hostile to God and in need of reconciliation, as Paul's letters elsewhere make more explicit (e.g., Rom. 5:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:12-21). The church's mission is to love 'the world,' to borrow a Johannine terminology, even when the world is hostile, as it was in Philippi. In the spirit of conformity to Jesus, the church in the power of the Spirit must look again for new ways to love the world incarnationally and cruciformly in the interest of the world's salvation. To be missional requires immense imagination."¹⁸ To follow Jesus is to proclaim His gospel of forgiveness and to forgive as we have been forgiven. This is a complex process that we will need to grow in through the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace and a loving community of saints.¹⁹

FORGIVENESS SUMMARY

WORKING DEFINITION: The offer of the healing balm of the Gospel to those who have sinned against you because of your having been forgiven.

WHAT IT ISN'T AND DOESN'T INCLUDE:

- Synonymous with reconciliation, which is a more complex process that forgiveness makes possible
- Denial or suspension of judgment or justice
- The abdication of temporal and/or eternal consequences by either the offended or the offender
- To be wielded over or weaponized against the offender
- The relationship remaining the same

WHAT IT INCLUDES:

- Prayer
 - Humility
 - Community
 - Suffering
 - Joy
-

¹⁸ Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*, 131-2.

¹⁹ The limits of this devotional do not allow for a discussion of the various complexities and nuances related to more difficult circumstances, but we recognize that they exist and require further discussion and wisdom beyond a blanket application of forgiveness.

Repentance will follow forgiveness as it does in the economy of salvation. With over 60 verses in the New Testament that address repentance, it serves as a key aspect of our following Jesus.²⁰ Mark J. Boda describes the process of repentance this way: “Returning to and repairing our relationship with God with the spiritual resources that God grants us is part of the reality of life lived in the present evil age, and this is why the New Testament calls a redeemed Christian community to repent. Repentance is thus a way of life, and it is the way to experience the abundance of life the Father intended, for which the Son suffered and into which the Spirit leads.”²¹ This process results from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit through the revealing light of God’s word, which proves true in both our justification and ongoing sanctification.²² As Thomas Boston observes, “(Repentance) is a grace given us of God freely, enabling and disposing a soul to all the acts of turning from sin to God....”²³ Thus, faith and repentance prove to be intertwined realities through the Holy Spirit in Jesus.²⁴ As Charles Octavius Booth observes, “...there will be seen in a sinner’s repentance toward God a new view, and a true view, of the character of God and what is due him, and also a new view, and a true view, of himself and of the folly and wickedness of his own wrong thoughts of God, of his neglect of him, his disobedience, and his enmity to him. This is a complete change of mind in regard to God, and in regard to his own feelings and conduct toward God ought to have been.”²⁵ Thus, we repent in order to enjoy our forgiveness in God as His beloved children.

This means that repentance is not primarily about behavior; it’s first and foremost about relationship (which will have an impact on behavior). Boda acknowledges this in writing, “Repentance is thus not moralism, that is, it is not focused on mere external behavioral change, but begins with an inner shift that is relational.”²⁶ Further, he points out that, “(t)he priority (in repentance) is placed on the positive return to relationship with God through the Spirit of

²⁰ J.C. Ryle, *Repentance: What it Means to Repent and Why We Must Do So* (Abbotsford: Aneko Press, 1878, Updated Edition 2021), 1.

²¹ Mark J. Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 194.

²² Thomas Boston, *Repentance: Turning From Sin to God* (Scotland: Christian Heritage, Reprinted 2012), 38-9.

²³ Ibid., 36.

²⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Grace of Repentance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 21-22.

²⁵ Charles Octavius Booth, *Plain Theology for Plain People* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017, Orig. pub. 1890), 66.

²⁶ Boda, *Return to Me*, 193.

grace, even as we grieve over our failure, confess our sins and abandon sinful attitudes, speech or actions.”²⁷ Our repentance allows us to joyfully reap the fruits of being reconciled to God and to others.

A key result of our repentance should be a change in our words and deeds as empowered by being at peace with God in Christ. As C. John Miller notes, “...it is the nature of the authentic Christian to respond with repentance and deeds of righteousness when corrected by the word.”²⁸ This will be reflected in our love for God and love for others as we mortify our desires to protect our distorted self-image. We choose not to clothe ourselves with a spider’s web leaving us exposed (cf. **Isaiah 59:5-6**), but, instead, we don the radiant garment of Christ’s righteousness, which can more clearly be seen through our repentance (cf. **Romans 13:11-14**). Iain M. Duguid captures the other oriented fruit of repentance: “Repentance inevitably draws our attention away from ourselves and out toward others. Bitterness drives us inward in self-absorbed depression, while true repentance enables us to start to serve other people’s needs.”²⁹ Repentance allows us to become humble servants as we follow Jesus, Who “came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many” (**Matthew 20:28**).

As previously noted, in all aspects of discipleship, we would rather be than endure the process of becoming. Nowhere is this truer than with repentance. Thomas Boston points out that “(repentance) is not a passing work of the first days of one’s religion, as some professors take it to be; but a grace in the heart setting one to an answerable working all the days of his life.”³⁰ **James 5:16** informs us of the necessity for ongoing confession of sin even as Christ’s disciple. Many have argued that as they mature in their understanding of the magnitude of Jesus’s forgiveness that they see more of their sins that required forgiving bringing about greater depths of repentance. Paul reflects this when he refers to himself in **1 Timothy 1:15** in the present tense as being chief among sinners. This means that a key part of our denying ourselves as we take up our crosses and follow Jesus will be our repenting and bearing fruits in keeping with that repentance.

²⁷ Boda, *Return to Me*, 194.

²⁸ C. John Miller, *Repentance: A Daring Call to Surrender* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 1975, Reprinted 2019), 57.

²⁹ Iain M. Duguid, *Esther & Ruth: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005), 169.

³⁰ Boston, *Repentance*, 36.

While repentance goes on for the whole of our lives, it should not turn to morbid introspection that keeps us from serving in Christ’s kingdom. Tish Warren Harris offers a helpful word from her book on Advent: “The call to repent is not a call to get busier, trying to jam more good works into an already over-crowded schedule, redoubling our efforts to ‘do better.’ It is a call to step back and pay attention. Not to remake oneself but to be remade. Reimagining everything from the ground up is a process. It takes time. It takes a miraculous amount of grace....To repent is to quit our own efforts to save ourselves and to slow down enough to allow God to transform who we are.”³¹ Once again, we recognize the need for the work of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the means of grace, and the support of a loving community.

REPENTANCE SUMMARY

WORKING DEFINITION: The turning away from sinful thoughts and actions³² and a turning to obedience in Christ as you bear the temporal consequences while offering whatever restitution and reparation necessary for reconciliation.

WHAT IT ISN’T AND DOESN’T INCLUDE:

- Merely saying you’re sorry (or words only)
- Sorrow only for the consequences³³
- Making excuses, minimizing, or relativizing³⁴
- Only shame, guilt, remorse, and/or self-loathing³⁵

³¹ Tish Warren Harris, *Advent: The Season of Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2023), 36-7

³² Thomas Watson lists 6 steps for turning from sin as the first aspect of repentance. The penitent must be able to clearly see the sin as an offense against God and the offended. This sight gives way to genuine sorrow over the offense, which must be confessed in prayer to God and trusted community. This results in a holy shame that gives way to a holy hatred for the separation and pain caused. At this point, the penitent can turn from the sin and turn to God for the fruits that should now be born in repentance. See further, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1668, Reprinted 2002), 18-58.

³³ Keller, *Forgive*, 145: “Repentance begins where blame shifting ends....False repentance is sorrow over the consequences of the sin and trouble it has caused you.”

³⁴ Keller, *Forgive*, 149: “To confess is to make a full, clean admission of what you have done wrong, without qualification or excuse, without minimizing or relativizing.”

³⁵ Ryle, *Repentance*, 8: “...religious feelings are worse than worthless if they are not accompanied by practice. Mere emotional excitement, without completely breaking off from sin, is not the repentance that God approves.”

- The abdication of temporal consequences and justice³⁶
- Self-flagellation or attempts to atone
- Things remaining the same

WHAT IT INCLUDES:

- Prayer
- Humility
- Confession
- Community
- Consequences including restitution and reparation where needed³⁷
- A visible change in words and deeds
- Suffering
- Joy³⁸

Suffering serves as another key component in our formation into the image of Christ. As Ware points out, “Suffering affliction, trials, testing – these are gifts granted to us by God for our growth, the necessary paving stones along the pathway that leads to our fullness of character and joy. Just as Jesus’s life of faith and obedience transforms our understanding of the importance of the little obediences of life, so does Jesus’s pathway of growth transform how we think of suffering. There is nothing accidental in suffering.”³⁹ Paul goes so far as to rejoice in the formative nature of suffering in **Romans 5:3-5**: “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Note how Paul grounds his suffering in God’s love.

³⁶ Per Jacob and Rachel Denhollander, “Justice: The Foundation of a Christian Approach to Abuse,” as quoted in Keller, *Forgive*, 99: “Truly repentant abusers who have come to side with God and their victims do not use their repentance as an excuse to escape human justice or make demands of their victims; true repentance involves acknowledging the harm they have done and the rightness of punishment.”

³⁷ Part of the fruits in keeping with repentance include making restitution (replacing the thing damaged or harmed) or reparation (a concomitant price paid where restitution cannot be made). See Boston, *Repentance*, 92-3.

³⁸ C. John Miller, *Repentance*, 23: “For the sure mark of authentic repentance is boldness and joyous enthusiasm for the things of God.”

³⁹ Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 70.

Given all that it produces, Paul views his suffering as an instrument in the Redeemer’s hands. Keller writes, “According to Christian theology, suffering is not meaningless – neither in general or particular instances. For God has purposed to defeat evil so exhaustively on the cross that all the ravages of evil will someday be undone and we, despite participating in it so deeply, will be saved. God is accomplishing this not in spite of suffering, agony, and loss but *through* it – it is through the suffering of God that the suffering of humankind will eventually be overcome and undone.”⁴⁰ Thus, what Satan intends for great evil and the destruction of God’s image in us will be used to display God’s glory more beautifully and profoundly in Christ. This powerful truth helps us to “outfox evil by receiving what it threatens us with.”⁴¹ Thus, suffering becomes “a way to know God better ... an opening for serving, resembling, and drawing near to him as never before.”⁴²

In order for us to live this out over the whole of our lives, we will need access to all of the heavenly helps available to us as with forgiveness and repentance. To deny ourselves in suffering requires all the strength and humility that the Holy Spirit, the means of grace, and community will supply. The same resources help us patiently wait for redemptive fruit from suffering. As Paul proclaims in **Romans 8:16-17**, we must bear the cross of suffering with Jesus in order to wear the crown of glory with Him when He returns.

SUFFERING IN UNION WITH CHRIST SUMMARY

WORKING DEFINITION: The pain, frustration, and persecution that comes from seeking to exalt Jesus and love others in His name in word and deed.

WHAT IT ISN’T AND DOESN’T INCLUDE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The daily pains and frustrations because of life in a fallen world • The consequences of our own sins • Immediate results
---	---

WHAT IT INCLUDES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Humility • Community • Joy
--------------------------	--

⁴⁰ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton, 2013), 163.

⁴¹ Paul E. Miller, *J-Curve*, 236.

⁴² Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 188.

Our willingness to daily deny ourselves and take up our crosses to follow Jesus in forgiveness, repentance, and suffering produces joy in both the Now and the Not Yet. Keller observes, "...the great theme of the Bible itself is how God brings fullness of joy not just despite but *through* suffering, just as Jesus saved us not in spite of but *because* of what he endured on the cross."⁴³ **Hebrews 12:2** calls for us to look to Jesus as the founder and perfecter of our faith who endured the horrors of the cross because of the joy that He took in knowing that we would be saved.

We, too, should take joy in the fruits of our forgiveness, repentance, and suffering that glorify God in exalting Jesus now and clothe Christ's bride more beautifully in eternity. Harold L. Senkbeil writes, "Jesus found joy in doing his Father's will because it was love in action.... Love and joy are inseparably bound together in the inscrutable will of God. The Father's love in action sent Jesus through first suffering and shame, and only then to glory. The Father's love brought him pain and death, but both were joy for Jesus because he confidently knew he was doing the Father's loving will. First the cross and then the crown; that's the way it works in God's economy. And that's the way it will work for you. Your joy will come as you see God's love in action through you...."⁴⁴ Please note again the role that love plays. Jesus acted out of love for God and for us, which resulted in joy because of the eternal results.

In following Him as we take up our crosses, we are called to act for the same loves in hope of the eternal results. As Timothy G. Gombis describes, "When disciples take on cruciform postures by seeking to meet needs, their hearts are overwhelmed with joy and delight and the church is strengthened in faith to see the future day of resurrection is indeed on the way." What a glorious picture of what it looks like to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily! He goes on to warn, "The tragic flipside is that when a community is dominated by postures and behaviors of selfish ambition, pride, and anger at one another, the presence of this evil age is stirred up. This radiates discouragement among the community and produces a loss of hope in God's power to transform."⁴⁵ Thus, we need the Holy Spirit, the means of grace, and fellow siblings in Christ to help us to cultivate joy and celebrate to God's glory, our joy, and for the life of the world.

⁴³ Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 6.

⁴⁴ Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 279.

⁴⁵ Timothy G. Gombis, *Power in Weakness: Paul's Transformed Vision for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 48-9.

JOY SUMMARY

WORKING DEFINITION: To take delight in what glorifies God in Jesus by drawing us and others closer to Him as well as bears eternal fruit in our lives and the lives of others.

WHAT IT ISN'T AND DOESN'T INCLUDE:

- Mere happiness or a feeling of some kind
- Self-exaltation or focus

WHAT IT INCLUDES:

- Prayer
- Sacrifice
- Generosity
- Community
- Forgiveness
- Repentance
- Suffering

The call to deny ourselves and take up our crosses to follow Jesus is a gracious invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God. We are God's chosen instruments to communicate His redeeming love in Christ amid the ruins of a fallen world. This is a high calling according to John E. Colwell: "The world has no access to the gospel story other than as it is narrated in the life, worship, and proclamation of the Church... Through its service and being a witness, the Church is rendering the gospel to the world."⁴⁶ This means that how we live now contributes to the beauty of the New Heaven and New Earth. As Keller reminds us, "The way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about your future."⁴⁷ Join us in growing as disciples of Christ who deny ourselves our selfish exaltations and take up our crosses of forgiveness, repentance, suffering, and joy through the Holy Spirit, the means of grace, and mutual encouragement.

We will continue to seek nourishment from the Old and New Testaments for our weekly devotion and worship. Various passages from across **the Old Testament** will call us to worship the God who forgives our iniquities, receives the fruits of our repentance, grants

⁴⁶ John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 85.

⁴⁷ Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 314.

meaning to our suffering, and offers us joy in His presence each week. We will respond together from a prayer composed for this series asking for the Lord's help in taking up our crosses to follow Jesus. Our assurances of pardon will come from **Paul and Peter's examples of forgiveness and repentance** as well as from **Jesus's example in and call to suffering and joy in union with Him**. We will receive a benedictory blessing each week from **Ephesians 6:23-24** to remind us that our obedience to God's Word is possible only through His love expressed to and received by us in union with Jesus Christ. The goal of these various elements is to shape us as disciples who daily deny our sinful selfishness and prayerfully take up our crosses to forgive, bear fruits in keeping with repentance, suffer for Jesus's glory, and joyfully celebrate the eternal fruits granted by our Abba Father.

This devotional is designed to encourage daily meditation and prayer in personal devotions and/or family worship. You are encouraged to use it the week prior to the associated sermon so that you and your family are prepared for worship. In addition to the Scriptures and associated questions, there are opportunities to pray for the various aspects of the Church. On Wednesdays, we will pray for the various works we support through Faith Promise. We also have the opportunity on Saturday to prepare for worship on Sunday. On Sunday, the Lord's Day Sabbath, we will pray for the means of grace to bear specific fruits in our lives. May God bless our time in personal devotion, family worship, and corporate worship as we seek for the Church to grow in knowing the joy of life in union with Christ!

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

SERMON SCHEDULE

DATE	CALL TO WORSHIP	ASSURANCE OF PARDON	BENEDICTION	SACRAMENT
<i>Sunday, 5/19:</i> LUKE 9:23-27	LEVITICUS 18:1-5	GALATIANS 2:19-20	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
<i>Sunday, 5/26:</i> LUKE 18:9-14	NUMBERS 14:17-19	GALATIANS 6:14-16	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	<i>Baptism</i>
<i>Sunday, 6/2:</i> MATTHEW 6:14-15	ISAIAH 1:18-20	EPHESIANS 4:29-32	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	
<i>Sunday, 6/9:</i> MATTHEW 18:21-35	JEREMIAH 31:31-34	COLOSSIANS 3:12-15	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
<i>Sunday, 6/16:</i> LUKE 5:27-32	EZEKIEL 18:30-32	2 PETER 3:8-9	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	
<i>Sunday, 6/23:</i> MATTHEW 3:7-10	DEUTERONOMY 28:9-14	ROMANS 6:20-23	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	
<i>Sunday, 6/30:</i> LUKE 15:1-10	ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20	1 PETER 1:3-9	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	<i>The Lord's Table</i>
<i>Sunday, 7/7:</i> 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11	ISAIAH 52:3-10	LUKE 9:18-22	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	
<i>Sunday, 7/14:</i> PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16	ISAIAH 53:1-6	LUKE 24:24-27	EPHESIANS 6:23-24	

Sunday, 7/21:
2 CORINTHIANS
12:1-10

ISAIAH
53:7-12

LUKE
22:39-46

EPHESIANS
6:23-24

The Lord's Table

Sunday, 7/28:
PHILIPPIANS
1:12-18

ISAIAH
9:2-7

LUKE
6: 20-23

EPHESIANS
6:23-24

Sunday, 8/4:
PHILIPPIANS
2:12-18

ISAIAH
25:6-9

LUKE
10:17-20

EPHESIANS
6:23-24

Sunday, 8/11:
2 CORINTHIANS
8:1-9

ISAIAH
12:1-6

JOHN
16:19-24

EPHESIANS
6:23-24

The Lord's Table

WEEKLY CONGREGATIONAL

Response to the Call to Worship

Lord Jesus,

Help us in the power of the Holy Spirit

And through the means of grace

To deny our sinful selfishness

And take up our crosses daily

And prayerfully follow You by

forgiving as we have been forgiven,

bearing fruits in keeping with repentance,

suffering for Your glory and the good of others,

and rejoicing in life more abundant as a result.

We humbly ask in Jesus's name,

Amen.

WEEKLY BENEDICTION

"Parting Blessing"

Peace be to you, brothers and sisters,
and love with faith, from God the Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with you all who love
our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

from **EPHESIANS 6:23-24**

Luke 9:23-27

THE WEEK OF MAY 19TH

Monday. 5/13: **LEVITICUS 18:1-5:** What has the greater influence on how you live daily: the surrounding culture or God's call to love Him and others as He has loved you?

Tuesday. 5/14: **GALATIANS 2:19-20:** Meditate on what it means to "live to God" and to no longer live according to yourself but according to Jesus who lives in you. How should this affect how you go about making decisions in daily life?

Wednesday. 5/15: Pray for the Robertsons to faithfully deny themselves daily and take up their crosses to follow Jesus in helping to plant churches and support leaders in South America through Mission to the World (MTW).

Thursday. 5/16: **LUKE 9:23-27:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in daily denying yourself to prayerfully follow Jesus in forgiveness, repentance, suffering, and joy.

Friday. 5/17: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** Where in your spheres of influence can you regularly serve others by speaking the peace of Christ to them?

Saturday. 5/18: Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare us to hear and understand what it means to take up our crosses daily as we follow Jesus and to protect us from distortions that lead to shameful burdens.

Sunday. 5/19: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH THE LORD'S TABLE:** Pray for the means of grace to grant us the strength to deny ourselves and take up our crosses daily to prayerfully follow Jesus in forgiveness, repentance, suffering, and joy.

Luke 18:9-14

THE WEEK OF MAY 26TH

Monday. 5/20: **NUMBERS 14:17-19:** Meditate on the character of God as quoted from **Exodus 34:6-7** in this passage. What is Moses's purpose for invoking God's character? What does this teach us about God's heart for His people?

Tuesday. 5/21: **GALATIANS 6:14-16:** What do you boast in through your words and deeds? What does Paul boast in, and how does it affect his words and deeds?

Wednesday. 5/22: Pray for the Blackmans with RUF at KSU help the students they serve grow in their acceptance and understanding of the forgiveness available to them in Jesus.

Thursday. 5/23: **LUKE 18:9-14:** Meditate on how deeply you're forgiven of both your sins that have proven costly and your vain good deeds that have earned you nothing.

Friday. 5/24: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** Who first shared with you the forgiveness of Jesus that leads to peace with God? Who could you share this with this week?

Saturday. 5/25: Read the preparatory letter for Clara Laughlin's baptism. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you improve upon your baptism by granting a deeper understanding of what it means to be forgiven of your sins past, present, and future.

Sunday. 5/26: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH BAPTISM:** Pray for the means of grace to help us to mortify our contempt for others not like us and to vivify our forgiveness in Christ.

Matthew 6:14-15

THE WEEK OF JUNE 2ND

Monday. 5/27: **ISAIAH 1:18-20:** Consider God's hospitality in inviting you to receive forgiveness according to His wisdom as well as His mercy in warning you of the deadly cost of trying to live without it. Give thanks for His hospitality and mercy towards you.

Tuesday. 5/28: **EPHESIANS 4:29-32:** How does Paul encourage us to steward and cultivate our forgiveness in Jesus?

Wednesday. 5/29: Pray for First Care Women's Clinic to share with all who come through the doors Christ's hospitable invitation to be forgiven in Him.

Thursday. 5/30: **MATTHEW 6:14-15:** In what ways are you intentionally stewarding and cultivating your forgiveness by forgiving others in your spheres of influence?

Friday. 5/31: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How have you been blessed by someone else forgiving you? How can you bless others by genuinely forgiving them?

Saturday. 6/1: Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring people to worship who need to be forgiven in Jesus and that He would grant eternal fruit from our time together in God's Word.

Sunday. 6/2: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to form us further into Christ's image by leading us to become a more forgiving community for God's glory, our joy, and the life of the world

Matthew 18:21-35

THE WEEK OF JUNE 9TH

Monday. 6/3: **JEREMIAH 31:31-34:** What is required for you to be able to know the Lord? What is the summary of the law that has been written on your heart?

Tuesday. 6/4: **COLOSSIANS 3:12-15:** Which of these characteristics do you most struggle to display (or put on) in your life? What are you doing to grow in being able to better display them?

Wednesday. 6/5: Pray for the Johnsons with Vision Collegiate Ministries to equip college students to be ambassadors of reconciliation through Jesus's forgiveness.

Thursday. 6/6: **MATTHEW 18:21-35:** When faced with an opportunity to forgive someone, do you begin with the reasons why you shouldn't, or do you prayerfully pursue wisdom as to how it can be done genuinely for the edification of all involved?

Friday. 6/7: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** Meditate on how many times Jesus has forgiven you in love and grace. How does this grow your faith in Him with love?

Saturday. 6/8: Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict you of where you're struggling to forgive and of how to go about being freed from the burden of the struggle.

Sunday. 6/9: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH THE LORD'S TABLE:** Pray for the means of grace to help us grow in wisely pursuing and applying forgiveness where needed.

Luke 5:27-32

THE WEEK OF JUNE 16TH

Monday. 6/10: **EZEKIEL 18:30-32:** If God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, then should we?

Tuesday. 6/11: **2 PETER 3:8-9:** Why is God patient? How should this affect your reason for being patient with others?

Wednesday. 6/12: Pray for the Whittles with Equipping Leaders International to equip leaders to plant churches that call sinners to repentance in Jesus.

Thursday. 6/13: **LUKE 5:27-32:** Why did Jesus come? Which have you offered Him: your sins or your evidence of righteousness?

Friday. 6/14: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How has Jesus's kindness toward you in your repentance helped you to grow in your faith in His love for you?

Saturday. 6/15: Pray for the Holy Spirit to move sinners to repentance in Jesus through our worship on Sunday.

Sunday. 6/16: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to convict us of our sin and apply the healing balm of our assurance of pardon in Christ.

Matthew 3:7-10

THE WEEK OF JUNE 23RD

Monday. 6/17: **DEUTERONOMY 28:9-14:** Meditate on the ways in which God has blessed you in following Him in love. Give thanks for His goodness to you.

Tuesday. 6/18: **ROMANS 6:20-23:** In what ways have you experienced greater freedom from guilt and shame through union with Christ?

Wednesday. 6/19: Pray for the Mills with MTW in Bangkok to disciple others to bear fruits in repentance as evidence of their new life in Jesus.

Thursday. 6/20: **MATTHEW 3:7-10:** What all is included and expected in repentance?

Friday. 6/21: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How have the fruits of your repentance at various times helped you to grow in love with greater faith in Jesus?

Saturday. 6/22: Pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare us to bear fruit in keeping with who and Whose we are in Christ.

Sunday. 6/23: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to strengthen us to bear fruits in and through our ongoing repentance.

Luke 15:1-10

THE WEEK OF JUNE 30TH

Monday. 6/24: **ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20:** Why do we sing praise songs? What of this prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus?

Tuesday. 6/25: **1 PETER 1:3-9:** How does the need for ongoing repentance in your life test the genuineness of your faith?

Wednesday. 6/26: Pray for Mike Kennemer with MNA Disaster Response to sacrificially serve through the Lord's provision those who've been affected by a natural disaster.

Thursday. 6/27: **LUKE 15:1-10:** Do you struggle with the resource cost of pursuing those lost without Jesus? Where are the resources coming from?

Friday. 6/28: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** Reflect on the eternal value to you of Jesus loving you with a love incorruptible. What did he expend for your redemption?

Saturday. 6/29: Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring the lost to know that they've been rescued from sin and death in Jesus through our worship service.

Sunday. 6/30: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH THE LORD'S TABLE:** Pray for the means of grace to resource us for the purpose of pursuing those who don't yet know Jesus.

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

THE WEEK OF JULY 7TH

Monday. 7/1: **ISAIAH 52:3-10:** Reflect on the various sufferings that the Lord has delivered you from. Give praise for God's comfort and deliverance.

Tuesday. 7/2: **LUKE 9:18-22:** If Jesus who is the Christ (or Messiah or King) must suffer enroute to resurrection, then what should you expect as you are prepared for resurrection?

Wednesday. 7/3: Pray for the Webbs with MTW in Bulgaria to minister to those who are suffering with the comfort of Christ.

Thursday. 7/4: **2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11:** How has your suffering equipped you to be a comfort to others?

Friday. 7/5: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How has the Spirit transformed your suffering into a deeper love for and faith in Christ?

Saturday. 7/6: Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring comfort to those who are suffering by the word and presence of God in and through His people.

Sunday. 7/7: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to teach us how to use our suffering for the comfort of others.

Philippians 3:7-16

THE WEEK OF JULY 14TH

Monday. 7/8: **ISAIAH 53:1-6:** Give thanks for the Son who served as the Suffering Servant who was pierced for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquities.

Tuesday. 7/9: **LUKE 24:24-27:** Why was it necessary for Jesus to suffer?

Wednesday. 7/10: Pray for the Larsens with NEXT Ministries to help the students they serve worldwide to grow in sanctification in Jesus despite and through their suffering.

Thursday. 7/11: **PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16:** What role does suffering play in our sanctification according to Paul? What is your role in the process?

Friday. 7/12: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How has the Spirit's comfort and transformation amid your suffering helped you to love Jesus with a love incorruptible?

Saturday. 7/13: Pray for the Holy Spirit to draw those who are suffering to help them see how Jesus can bring life more abundant despite and through their suffering.

Sunday. 7/14: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to sanctify us in and through our sufferings and losses.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

THE WEEK OF JULY 21ST

Monday. 7/15: **ISAIAH 53:7-12:** Consider the strength of the Suffering Servant to endure such suffering on your behalf. Why did He do it?

Tuesday. 7/16: **LUKE 22:39-46:** Praise Jesus for His endurance of such anguish to strengthen you in your greatest weaknesses of all. Share this with someone this week.

Wednesday. 7/17: Pray for the Women's Extension to offer Jesus's redeeming strength to women who have been overwhelmed by their weaknesses.

Thursday. 7/18: **2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10:** If Paul who had so many profound spiritual experiences and encounters with Jesus was plagued with suffering and weakness so that Christ would be exalted, then what should you expect?

Friday. 7/19: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How has Jesus's strength being manifested in and through your weaknesses helped you to experience God's grace more profoundly?

Saturday. 7/20: Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in our suffering and weakness to exalt Jesus.

Sunday. 7/21: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH THE LORD'S TABLE:** Pray for the means of grace to nourish us to patiently endure our suffering in weakness so that Jesus would be exalted as our true strength.

Philippians 1:12-18

THE WEEK OF JULY 28TH

Monday. 7/22: **ISAIAH 9:2-7:** What brings God's people joy?

Tuesday. 7/23: **LUKE 6:20-23:** According to Jesus, who is blessed and in what should you rejoice?

Wednesday. 7/24: Pray for the Stocks with MTW in Malaysia to take joy in the advance of the Gospel even if it includes their ill-treatment.

Thursday. 7/25: **PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18:** What brings Paul joy amid his ill-treatment? What can you learn from his example?

Friday. 7/26: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** Does it bring you joy to proclaim the peace, love, and grace of Christ to those in your spheres of influence?

Saturday. 7/27: Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring people to a saving faith in Christ regardless of the weaknesses of the one who shares it with them.

Sunday. 7/28: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to cultivate a greater joy in the advance of the Gospel despite the various costs.

Philippians 2:12-18

THE WEEK OF AUGUST 4TH

Monday. 7/29: **ISAIAH 25:6-9:** Meditate on what God has promised is to come. What brings you joy about what is to come?

Tuesday. 7/30: **LUKE 10:17-20:** What does Jesus call the disciples to rejoice in? What can you learn from this?

Wednesday. 7/31: Pray for the Sawyers with Straight Up Missions in Kenya to continue to faithfully serve the people of Masai Mara providing many opportunities for rejoicing near and far.

Thursday. 8/1: **PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18:** What does Paul prescribe to help you be able to rejoice even amid difficult losses?

Friday. 8/2: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How have you been blessed by hearing about the peace, love, and grace that Christ has brought to others?

Saturday. 8/3: Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring those who will challenge us to rejoice in what matters most in eternity.

Sunday. 8/4: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH:** Pray for the means of grace to train us in how to rejoice in the saving power of Christ more festively wherever we encounter it.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

THE WEEK OF AUGUST 11TH

Monday. 8/5: **ISAIAH 12:1-6:** What brings the people joy causing them to break out in praise and thanksgiving?

Tuesday. 8/6: **JOHN 16:19-24:** What will bring the disciples joy according to Jesus? What will help make their joy full?

Wednesday. 8/7: Pray for the Johnsons with Vision 9:38 to train missionaries who will help others grow in their joy in Christ and their generosity towards the advance of the Gospel.

Thursday. 8/8: **2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9:** What connection does Paul make between the joy of being in union with Christ and generosity? How is your generosity affected by your joy in being in union with Christ?

Friday. 8/9: **EPHESIANS 6:23-24:** How does the sacrificial generosity and joy of Jesus cause you to love Him with a love incorruptible?

Saturday. 8/10: Read the preparatory letter for the Lord's Table. Pray for the Holy Spirit to stir our joy and generosity for Jesus's glory.

Sunday. 8/11: **THE LORD'S DAY SABBATH WITH THE LORD'S TABLE:** Pray for the means of grace to grow our joy in union with Christ to become more generous people.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

for Further Study

General:

Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015)

Paul E. Miller, *J-Curve: Dying and Rising with Jesus in Everyday Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019)

Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012)

Forgiveness:

Timothy Keller, *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* (New York: Viking, 2022)

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996)

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope*, Revised Ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003)

Repentance:

Mark J. Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015)

Thomas Boston, *Repentance: Turning from Sin to God* (Scotland: Christian Heritage, Reprinted 2012)

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Grace of Repentance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010)

C. John Miller, *Repentance: A Daring Call to Real Surrender* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 1975, Reprinted 2019)

J.C. Ryle, *Repentance: What It Means and Why We Must Do So* (Abbotsford: Aneko Press, 2021)

Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1668, Reprinted 2002)

Suffering:

Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton, 2013)

R.C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 1989)

Philip Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts?*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977, 1990)

Joy:

Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1648, Reprinted 2022)

Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2012)