



The Way of The Cross

The words Jesus spoke from the cross point to the cost of following Him.

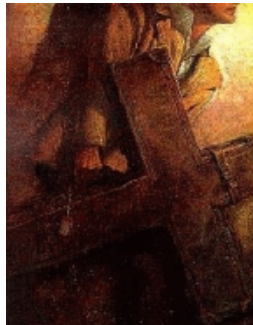
Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

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THE WAY OF LONELINESS

While Jesus was on the cross God made His judgment known to the world in an awful way: **"From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land."** And then, in the midst of that great darkness, **"Jesus cried out in a loud voice, . . . 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"** ([Matthew 27:45-46](#)).

The way of the cross for Jesus meant the cold darkness of God's judgment on sin. It meant an overpowering sense of rejection, abandonment, and condemnation when He who had never sinned became sin for us so that we might be made righteous in Him.



Sometimes the Lord, in His wisdom that seems to us foolishness, gives us the sense that we are entirely in the dark, wholly alone, abandoned by Him and by everyone around us.

After his triumphant victory over 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah the prophet lost his courage when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. He ran and hid and prayed that God would let him die. For 40 days he suffered the loneliness of the desert and, though visited by angels who met his

physical needs, appears to have known nothing of the spiritually strengthening presence of God. It took a terrifying demonstration of God's power, followed by a still, small voice, to restore Elijah to any sense of fruitful communion with God. (See [1 Kings 19:1-18](#).)

I believe that Elijah, when threatened, forgot who had given him the power to do wonders in the past three years. He suddenly thought he had to handle the problems on his own. He gave up the battle and fled. And when he did, he fled from the voice of God.

I think God lets us do that every once in a while so that we will know that the power even for taking up the cross and following Him comes not from ourselves but from Him. He gives us a period of darkness, loneliness, emptiness. Our prayers go unanswered. We yearn for His voice but hear nothing. Finally we cry out, **"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"**

It wasn't until after Jesus had died that the separation ended. And then, after three days, God raised Him in glory. So it must be with us sometimes. We must die to ourselves and let Him give us new life. No matter what storms we have to weather first, if we wait, the whisper will finally come.

THE WAY OF THE DESERT

Hanging on the cross, short of blood and dehydrated, feeling the weight of the sins of the world, Jesus quietly, weakly said, **"I am thirsty"** (John 19:28).

There are times when taking up the cross means going thirsty. It means reading the Bible and getting nothing out of it, going to church and listening carefully but hearing nothing. Jesus' thirst on the cross was physical, but it was also a picture of spiritual thirst. Often we must carry the cross through the desert.

When Israel was preparing to enter the Promised Land, Moses gathered the people together and said to them:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how *the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.—Deut. 8:1-3, emphasis mine*

God led the Israelites through the desert so that they would learn to trust humbly in Him, to look to Him to provide all their needs, to believe

that He could always do something new, something neither they nor their fathers had ever seen before, to take care of them. He broke their trust in themselves and their complacent assumptions about God. And then, after the desert, God brought them **"into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills"** (Deut. 8:7).

If you are dry, feeling no sense of communion with God, wait patiently. Don't panic. Keep walking in faith, one step at a time, until you come to the end of your desert, even if it takes 40 years.

We go to our Father, knowing that He will **"give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him"** (Luke 11:13). **"If anyone is thirsty,"** Jesus said, **"let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him"** (John 7:37-38).

THE WAY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

In response to Jesus' cry of thirst, the soldiers offered Him a sponge soaked in wine vinegar, but after tasting it He refused to drink. Instead He said, **"It is finished: (John 19:30).**

A few days before His death on the cross Jesus told the disciples:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must

follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.— John 12:23-26, emphasis mine

Our natural inclination is to seek a way to glory that skirts the cross. But Paul knew that the two must go together: **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead"** (Phil 3:10). We focus on knowing the power of His resurrection, but reject Paul's warning that that comes only by sharing in His sufferings. If there is no daily taking up of the cross, there is no daily resurrection and hence no daily power. God does not give us the option of enjoying only resurrection power without crucifixion weakness.

THE WAY OF SURRENDER

At the very moment of His death Jesus prayed, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** (Luke 23:46). Just days before He had prayed something that amounted to the same thing: **"Not my will, but yours be done"** (Luke 22:42). And the Father took Him at His word.

E. Stanley Jones' book Victory through Surrender has helped me more than any other book but the Bible. In it Jones explains that only by surrendering our wills to God can we have victory in Christian service. We must relinquish control, must hold with an open hand all those relationships and activities and possessions God has graciously given us but that we are sorely tempted to cling to as substitutes for God Himself.

Even less to our liking, taking up

the cross means surrendering, sometimes even to the enemies of God. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter tried to resist with a sword. Jesus quickly rebuked him:

Put your sword back in its place, . . . for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?—Matthew 26:52-54.

Jesus knew that He must surrender to the evil of this world in order to overcome it.

When **Joseph Ton** was a pastor in Romania he was arrested by the secret police for publishing a sermon calling for the churches to refuse to submit to the Communist government's demand for control over their ministries. When an official told him he must renounce his sermon, he replied, "No, sir! I won't do that!"

The official, surprised that anyone would respond so forcefully to the secret police, said, "Aren't you aware that I can use force against you?" "Sir, let me explain that to you," Ton said. "You see, your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying . . . You know that my sermons are spread all over the country on tapes. When you kill me, I only sprinkle them with my blood. They will speak 10 times louder after that, because everybody will say, 'That preacher meant it because he sealed it with his blood.' So go on, sir, kill me. When you kill me, I win the supreme victory." The secret police released him, knowing his martyrdom would be far more of a problem than his sermon.

Ton is living testimony to the

truth of Paul's words, written from prison:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.—Phil. 1:12-14

As Christians, the real victory we seek in this world is not for ourselves, but for the gospel. Our greatest yearning should be for God's kingdom to expand and for His will to be done on earth. Often we must surrender *ourselves* to what the world views as defeat in order for the gospel to advance.

ARE YOU TAKING UP YOUR CROSS?

Are you willing to suffer the pain and humiliation of the cross? Will you forgive and embrace those who sin against you and see what they meant for harm as sent from God for good? Are you prepared to be separated from those you love, to be dependent on others, and to face the loneliness that sometimes comes with dedication to Christian service? Will you keep walking faithfully, one step at a time, through the desert of the soul, when it seems God has abandoned you? Have you committed yourself to accomplishing what God calls you to do? And are you prepared to surrender all to God and not to strike back at those who oppose you?

Are you taking up your cross and following Jesus?



Email: Admin@wllwcc.org

W.L.A. Living Word Christian Center
6520 Arizona Avenue
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*PTS Pastor Eddie	Nov 27-Dec 1	Tegucigalpa, Honduras

***PTS = Pastor's Training School with Covington Seminary Extension**