

THIRTY DAYS AT THE FEET OF THE CROSS



INDIAN CHURCH OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

These are excerpts taken from the book “**THIRTY DAYS AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS**” Edited by Thomas and Sheila Jones.

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Twenty centuries ago the God did what hardly anyone was expecting. He came as a baby and died on a cross. It was hard to believe then. It was hard for those closest to Jesus to believe. To many people it was downright foolishness. But to those who believed, to those who looked closely and decided there is good reason to believe, it was nothing less than the most powerful revelation ever received from the living God.

No one can fully fathom the mysteries that are here, but the closer we can get to it all, the better we will be.

What we propose to do here is to spend thirty days thinking about the event. If, with the help of God, we do it well, these thirty days will lead to a lifetime of living with a new perspective and a greater appreciation for the power of God.

What is shared here can help you, too, to understand why the cross is still the wisdom and the power of God.

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1.UNCONDITIONAL LOVE - While we were still sinners

*But God demonstrates his love for us in this: **While we were still sinners**, Christ died for us. **Romans 5:8***

We don't feel good at all when we know we are unloved. We don't feel much better when we aren't sure if we are loved. But what a difference it makes when we absolutely know that we are loved—when there has been a demonstration that proves it.

However, if we know we are loved because of our looks or our money or our performance, insecurity lies just below the surface of those good feelings. We know we could lose it if accident, illness, bankruptcy, sin, mistake or failure were to rob us of those things that endear us to others.

When we stand at the foot of the cross and behold the love of God, we see how unbelievably unconditional his love is.

While we were sinners—in the worst of shape—God demonstrated his love for us at the cross. None of this is a testimony to God's softness on sin. No one—absolutely no one—is tougher on sin than God. It is, however, a testimony to *how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is (Ephesians 3:18).*

The cross establishes that there is a God; he is love; his love is unconditional. Nothing we can do or fail to do will stop him from loving us.

What does that mean for you today?

If God loved you while you were his enemy, what does it mean now that you are his child?

If he loved you last year when your work for him was flourishing, what does it mean now that you feel that dreaded “spiritual dryness”?

What I find in God at the cross, do I put into my own heart and mind?

Do you Deal with others the way God deals with you?

(1 John 4:11).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Psalm 32 ; Matthew 18:23-35; Luke 15:11-32; John 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:1-10

2. HATING SIN - Feel the Pain

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. **1 Peter 2:24***

When it comes to the cross—feel the pain. Understand that one of the most important truths of the cross is that sin—my sin and your sin—hurts God.

This is the truth I must absolutely know and feel before I can be saved, but this is the same truth of which I must continually be more and more convicted to remain saved.

Question: Did you ever wholeheartedly love someone and then, they stopped loving you? Remember the pain? Now, feel God's pain!

Question: Have you ever had someone take advantage of you and use you? Remember the pain? Now, feel God's pain!

Question: Have you ever been neglected? Forgotten? Rejected? Betrayed? Remember the pain? Now, feel God's pain!

Question: What would it feel like if the man or woman of your dreams committed his or her life to you in marriage and then was untrue to you—slept with another—committed adultery? How would you feel?

This is how God feels when we are untrue to him.

How does God feel about your lack of care, a lack of trust?

How does God feel about your sexual sin?

How does God feel about being pushed aside for the sake of family, job, business or school?

How does God feel about a lack of desire and excitement for him and about him?

How would you feel about these things in a relationship?

The greater the capacity to love, the greater the capacity to feel pain. The greater the love, the greater the potential for being hurt.

When it comes to the cross, all the days of our lives we must—FEEL THE PAIN!

Sin hurts God. What's the depth of your desire not to hurt your God with your sin?

Today, make lasting decisions about your sin and your relationship with God. How? It's really very simple—feel the pain!

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Psalm 36; Isaiah 43:16-24; 53:4-6; Hosea 11; Luke 15:21-24; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; James 4:7-10

3. THE BLOOD OF CHRIST - It keeps on cleansing

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

What could I do to equal what Jesus had already done for me? Could I do enough good deeds, stay perfectly pure, crawl on my knees far enough, give enough money, pray loudly enough or convert enough sinners? Nothing I could do could come close to his sacrifice of love and grace.

Jesus' shed blood was the only thing that could possibly attain forgiveness for me (**Ephesians 1:7**).

His blood was not meant to be a once-in-a-lifetime event. The benefits of his blood are assured to us as his children.

Shed blood represents one life given for another.

Our thinking that God's plan for forgiveness is too easy, too hard or somehow faulty.

We cannot substitute a bucket of tears, 365 good deeds a year, or weeks of prayer and fasting. We cannot pridefully try to reach enough perfection to merit forgiveness (**Romans 3:23**).

Do we have more faith in our weak, self-invented sacrifices than we do in God's perfect plan of grace? Jesus' sacrifice for our sins must be accepted first then our joyful sacrificial life for God makes sense.

Will you accept your value and worth based on being a blood-brought sinner and not on your ability to produce a perfect life?

What will you do the next time you fall into sin?

FOR FURTHER STUDY- Psalm 130; Romans 5:1-11; Hebrews 9:15-22; 1 Peter 1:18-20; 1 John 1:5-10

4. FORGIVENESS - The Freedom of Forgiveness

³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **Ephesians 4:32-5:2***

Forgiveness is not a human virtue- it is clearly a divine virtue made possible by God. The motivation is provided by Jesus' example on the cross.

How did he do it? Life for him was never fair from birth to death.

Unlike you and me he didn't expect life to be fair-he simply knew God to be fair.

Judas his betrayer, Peter the one who denied him and others who abandoned received only kindness from him.

He not only practiced forgiveness he trained his disciples too (**Matt 18:21-35**) in the parable of the Unmerciful servant.

In **Luke 17:1-5**- he taught to forgive the brother seven times in a day!

Gethsemane demonstrated his pain when in agony he shed blood with sweat and on the cross the anticipation of separation from God became a reality when he screamed loudly "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

In spite of all the pain and suffering, he faced death without a trace of bitterness towards God or man. Therefore his trust in God was rewarded with resurrection.

Do we feel the pain of our hurts ? That's reality

Do we trust in God like Jesus did? That will release us from all the anger, rage, resentment or bitterness.

Trust God and surrender to him and his ways of forgiving and leaving justice to God himself.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Hosea 14:1-2; Matt 16:21-35; Luke 17:1-4; Ephesians 4:31-32; 1 Peter 2:18-25

5. BAPTISM - back to the future

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. **Romans 6:3-4**

Baptism is God's plan to connect every disciple to the cross of His only son Jesus.

In baptism we were “buried with him...and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised from the dead (Col 2:12)

Baptism was our tomb where we were buried with Christ.

Peter knew that cross which he feared and ran away from was the connecting point to all humans and God when he preached “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts2:38-39)

Are you still far off ? Or are you connected?

Do you walk in the confidence of someone who died and has resurrected? ...anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Romans6:6-7)

Today take a trip to the cross and the empty tomb of Christ. Remember your baptism tomb and all the baptisms you have witnessed over the years. Remember your prayer in the waters of Baptism before you were buried with Christ. Remember the joy when you escaped that watery tomb.

Now turn your sights to each of your family and friends and other people around you who have not connected to Christ through the death, burial and resurrection of Baptism. You cannot do this for them but you can call them to the Cross.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 Kings 5:1-14; Galatians 3:26-29; Col 2:9-15

6. THE LORD'S SUPPER - always remembering

¹⁴ *When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*

¹⁹ *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

²⁰ *In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*

Luke 22:14-15,19-20

Passover .To the Jews this word meant Freedom from slavery in Egypt(**Exodus 12**).

Jesus was celebrating this festival when he declared- **the new covenant** - the new plan, the perfect, once-for-all amnesty scheme had come replacing the Jewish sacrificial system.

That's what communion was instituted and meant for.

Jesus knew that in order for us to maintain motivation and focus we would need to come together and go to the foot of the cross to remember.

Jesus was about to be killed and yet he "*gave thanks*". Because his Father's will was going to be accomplished and people's lives were going to be changed.

This Sunday as you take communion, cry out in your heart "*What can separate us from the love of Christ?*" and give thanks.

But as you give thanks examine yourselves(**1 Cor 11:28**) not condemn yourself.

Humble your heart. Let the cross reveal your sin that needs to be confessed and crucified.

Are you remembering the Lord as he asked to be remembered? Are you giving thanks the way he gave? Does this special time pulse with freedom for you? Do you live for this moment when all the disciples gather together to remember the new covenant that was written by the blood of Christ?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Exodus 12; Isaiah 53; Romans 8:31-39; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

7. WISDOM - the wisdom and power of God

¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1 Cor 1:18

In the cross we see the ultimate display of God's wisdom, power and salvation.

But his plan for redemption has been misunderstood and has been a stumbling block for many over the centuries.

God took a despised cross, mocked and abused man on it and gave the world-righteousness, holiness and redemption(**1 Cor 1:26-31**)

Today the spirit of the Jews and Greeks lives on. Denying our self and carrying the cross is seen as unfashionable. We look for a more rational, liberal, gentler, kinder and milder version of following Christ.

Secular devotion to studies or sports or scientific discoveries or art is praised and yet when someone devotes passionately to study the cross and follow Jesus he is ridiculed and looked down upon.

Jesus didn't come to impress the world. How about you?

How do you deal with the wisdom and arguments of the world?

Do you use the wisdom and Power of God that is displayed on the cross of Jesus?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Corinthians 1-3, 4:18-21, Isaiah 55:8-11; 2 Cor 10:1-5; James 3:13-18.

8. BOASTING - who gets the credit

¹⁴ *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. **Galatians 6:14***

It is in our nature to accept credit and boast about our accomplishments. We forget that it was God who gave us the ability and opportunity to achieve all that. We boast because it verifies our worth.

We go about a day without Prayer and Bible Study without seeing the arrogance in our hearts.

*... but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. **2 Cor 12:5b**.*

Boast in our weakness? It is upside down. The cross affirms our worth not what we do or achieve or boast.

The cross frees us from performing, from looking for credit.

Why should we boast about our weakness?

2 Cor 12:9b, 10b- *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Wouldn't you want the power of God that created the universe that parted the Red Sea that resurrected a dead man in your life? You can have all that by boasting about your weakness.

That doesn't mean we need to pity ourselves and feel low about ourselves.

It just means that we rely on the love God has for us and not on anyone else to stay faithful to God and Jesus.

He is a person who can admit his inadequacies and confess his sins and look to God for verification. He is free of the need to project an image or prove his worth.

Are you such a person? Do you want to be such a person? Are you boastful or humble? Do you trust in God or your own abilities? Do you push others away in your need to prove yourself, or do you draw others to you through your vulnerability?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Deut 8:10-18 ; Daniel 4:28-37 ; Romans 4; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 5:11-21

9. SURRENDER - life through death

²³ *Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, 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. ²⁵Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **John 12:23-25***

God's wisdom is totally opposite to our thoughts. In him **Victory comes through Surrender. Strength comes through weakness. Life comes through death.**

Denying self and taking up the cross daily is difficult. Voluntary surrender is not easy. Cross is neither comfortable nor enjoyable. Christ cannot be formed in us unless we are crucified with him (**Gal 2:20,4:19**).

To desire to control is deeply ingrained in us. We become adept manipulators of people and circumstances and are bold enough to try the same even with God.

Jesus wants to free us from this. Satan wants to dupe us into exchanging the bondage of sin with the bondage of powerless religion.

We are fools to believe Satan because God's way is painful.

Most of the crisis in our life is designed to crucify our pride and selfishness to produce surrender and subsequent growth it brings.

Jesus had to go through it (**Hebrews 5:8-9**).

We will not be mature without suffering (**Hebrews 12:5-11; James 1:2-3**).

Consider our prayers- are they requests for God to rubberstamp our selfish desires?

Are we the Lord of our life or God is? Pray about all of the specific ways you have to surrender.

Open about your struggles to surrender specifically to one another. Be committed in this depth of relationship. Be willing to serve much beyond your comfort.

Let Go and Let God!

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Isaiah 42:5-7; Matt 26:36-46; Col 1:13-14, 2:8; 2 Tim 2:25-26; James 4:1-3

10. SELF DENIAL - denial without regret

¹⁶ *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.* **1 John 3:16**

Jesus had plenty of opportunities to say- “that's enough!... have him do it not me!...that's not my responsibility!....I'm tired; let someone else do it... You do it...I have done enough... That's not my job... Get off my back!...I'll do it when I feel like.”

But he never said this.

He denied himself and carried the cross everyday till he died.

This battle was won by him by prayers (**Matt 26:36-46**).

Without self denial there can be no cross. Without cross there can be no salvation.

Tempted to focus on his own pain he forgave his tormentors (**Luke 23:34**), saved a criminal (**Luke 23:43**), and provided for his mother (**John 19:27**).

²³ *Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.* **Luke 9:23**

It is easy to deny and care for people whom we love- our wife or children or parents.

Is our self denial limited to people who are close to us?

Jesus has sent us out to love strangers and even our enemies, to offer them our very selves.

Open your eyes and look at the needs all around you, serve and help transform the lives of others.

If you question “Why should I?”

Just remember – you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. God will bless it.

Let us go to the cross and deny ourselves again and again and again, until there is nothing left to give.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Romans 5:1-11; Phil 2:1-11; James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:11-20

11. HUMILITY - to heights of humility

⁵*In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[a] of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! **Phil 2:5,7-8***

It is often assumed humility means being quiet, passive, soft and weak, a “push-over”, without conviction. Does this sound like Jesus to you?

Jesus was a man of passion, deep conviction, boldness and purpose. He confronted opponents and pressed on resolutely towards his goals.

He emptied himself and took the very nature of a servant to his Father and to his fellow men. He washed their feet, touched the leper and obeyed God in everything to death.

Even though he was innocent he obeyed his Father to be cursed and rejected on the cross and brutally murdered (**Deut 21:22-23**).

Questions to Test your Humility

-How do you feel about serving- God, his church, your neighbours, your wife, your husband, your enemy?

-Do you feel “too good” for something?

-Do you trust God even when doing so means being put in some low position or having to suffer for others?

There is no real humility without faith. Consider these scriptures

-Where does God dwell?—with the Humble and Contrite(**Isaiah 57:15**)

-Who does God esteem?-He who is humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at His word (**Isaiah 66:2-3**).

-Do you tremble at his word? Do quiet times change you?

-Who receives grace?- God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble(**James 4:6**)

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Peter 5:5-6; Philippians 2:1-11; Pro 22:4; 11:2; 18:12

12. LIFESTYLE - every day

²³ *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*

Luke 9:23

The cross daily, Everyday and not just on Sunday. The cross as a lifestyle was how Jesus lived.

Before Baptism we became conscious of our spiritual deadness. Then when the Cross came into view our life changed we confessed our sins, repented and became alive through death on the cross, burial in the waters of Baptism and resurrected for eternity.

These convictions were meant to become our life after Baptism day after day after day.

If the cross is not our lifestyle sin will be(**Romans 6:16**). If the cross is daily carried we die to self daily and resurrect daily.

Daily we die to selfishness and be raised to service; daily we die to greed and raised to generosity; daily we die to foolishness and raise to wisdom; daily we die to insecurity and raise to confidence; daily we die to impurity and raise to purity and holiness.....

It means dealing with sin quickly- confessing, acknowledging, repenting, forgiving or asking forgiveness, and not letting it drag on for days or years.

Do you do this or run away from dealing all this? Do you withdraw and become uncommunicative? Do you overreact, oversleep, become rebellious?

Do you pray? Seek out godly counsel?

Which of this describe your life?

Is there any sin you are hanging on to instead of hanging on to the CROSS of CHRIST?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Cor 15:31; Romans 6:15-23;8:5-17; Hebrews 3:12-13;Acts 2:42-47; Phil 1:27; Psalm 145:2.

13. SACRIFICE - spectators or sacrifices

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **Romans 12:1***

Sacrifice. The very word brings images of pain, suffering, loss. Denying ourselves something we like or desire.

Our nature is selfishness. We are inclined to taking than giving. We are slaves to sin (**Romans 6:16-17**).

Sacrifice is a voluntary presentation of ourselves to God to be used for his purposes—to serve Him and His plans.

Look at Jesus. He gave up his position in heaven to serve, heal, love and preach the good news and die on the cross so that we could have a chance to be with Him.

He was betrayed, physically abused, humiliated, crucified and brutally murdered, separated from his Father—he did all that for us.

Why would he do it? Undeserved, unconditional love.

The sacrifice of Jesus is compelling and convicting (**2 Cor 5:14-15**)

Hiding will be dishonest; Being a spectator will be hypocritical; Committing is powerful.

As we struggle with sacrifice go to the garden of Gethsemane and pray “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*” (**Matt 26:39**)

Because Jesus prayed and prayed till he was ready to sacrifice joyfully.

So what happened after that. The disciples repented and presented themselves as living sacrifice. When we become living sacrifices we will affect the lives of people around us eternally.

Be moved and inspired by the love of Jesus and offer yourselves as living sacrifices. Discover that giving is more glorious than grasping.

FOR FURTHER STUDY : Genesis 22:1-19; Malachi 1:6-14; Matt 20:26-28; Mark 10:17-31; Acts 20:24; Phil 3:7-11

14. SUFFERING-Problem or Possibility?

²³ *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. **1 Peter 2:23***

¹⁰ *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. **1 Peter 5:10***

Suffering is a problem we want to avoid, we don't like it.

But Jesus suffered- abandonment, insults, false accusations, betrayal, flogging, humiliation, spat on face, crown of thorns, rejection and crucifixion.

Suffering tempts us. We don't handle it well. How did Jesus go through it without falling into sin and unfaithfulness?

Even on the cross how was it that his heart was full of mercy and forgiveness for his tormentors and murderers?

What questions do we struggle with? Why God? Why me? Is this from God or Satan? Why God doesn't answer?

God's will for Jesus was "*to crush him and cause him to suffer*" (**Isaiah 53:10**)

We should like Jesus not waste time and energy on finding out why we suffer rather how do we respond righteously to this suffering not losing our trust in God.

"Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds"(**James 1:2**)

Suffering purifies us, takes us to maturity, strengthens our faith.

With every struggle thank God and strive for righteousness.

Jesus for the joy set before him endured the cross.(**Heb 12:2**).What will you endure?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Malachi 1 & 3; Romans 5:1-5; Philipians 3:17-21; 4:10-20;Hebrews 5:7-10; 1 Peter 4:12-19

15. SERVING: If the King is the Servant?

²⁵ *Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* **Matt 20:25-28**

Unlike the worldly Kings who expect others to serve them and wait upon them Jesus-Son of God, King of Kings came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.

He viewed himself as a slave of God on behalf of man. Jesus didn't resist or resent that role. When he saw people he was not overwhelmed by their needs or desires but was filled with compassion and desire to help them. He didn't see that as burdensome. He paid the greatest price by putting our need of forgiveness and atonement before his very life.

The people who have had most impact on our lives are people who have served us- our parents, the ones who preached the Gospel to us....

Nothing moves the heart more than someone who puts the need of another above his own and willingly (not grudgingly) serve.

When Jesus showed the full extent of his love by washing their feet, the disciples were shocked, humbled and deeply moved.

Consider this-Jesus had the same heart for Judas as he had for Peter and John while washing the feet. That was his nature to serve. What is our nature- do we differentiate between whom to serve and whom not to? Do we serve the ones who are looking important or have leadership positions and ignore the others?

We are called to serve all- our family, brothers, sisters, the lost, the enemies.

How do we respond when the call of service interrupts our schedule?

If the King is the servant what does it mean for all of us?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Matt 20:20-28; 25:31-46; John 21:1-14; Romans 15:1-4

16. SERVING -The surprise of Serving

⁴² *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*

Mark 10:42-44

This servant in Mark 10 is a bond servant who had no rights, no wages, had no appeal was the outright property of his Master. They are the nothings of the Jewish society. Jesus willfully became that opening the way for us through the cross.

His desire to provide for our greatest need of forgiveness drove him to the Cross.

The degree to true greatness in the Kingdom of God is determined by the degree to which one has become a bond servant. It comes through self denial and not through self exaltation.

Are you known as a servant at your home, office space and church? Do people turn to you because they know you have a heart to serve?

The road to greatness that the sons of Zebedee in Mark 10 hoped for is achievable but it is through the valley of servant-hood, the cup of the suffering, the CROSS.

Let's forget climbing up the ladder of success and focus instead on climbing down the ladder until we reach the position of the bond servant.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Isaiah 52:13-53; Matt 10:24-25; Gal 5:13-15; James 1:9-11; 1 Peter 4:7-11; 5:2-4

17. DETERMINATION :Seeing it through

⁵¹ *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Luke 9:51*

It is not hard to start something but it takes character to finish. Jesus had that deep character. In the face of suffering, pain and opposition he met his goal- the death on a garbage dump outside Jerusalem.

Our first thought is that it must have been easy for Jesus as he is son of God.

A closer look shows us that he battled temptations and pressures like you and me daily.

Hebrews 4:15-... *we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*”

He faced it all. With dull disciples he could have given it up anytime.

How could he do it?

Hebrews 5:7-... *he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to one who could save him from death.....*

He did it with god.

God was enough for him.

We read **Luke 14:28-30** before becoming a disciple. We counted the costs and decided to make Jesus our Lord. Are we having the same decision, commitment and determination to finish the race today?

Is anything else distracting us (*corrupting worldly desires, worries and deceitfulness of wealth*) today and causing us to lose our determination for Jesus?

Distracted people don't accomplish anything?

Life with Jesus is like a marriage, begins with an irrevocable decision and lifetime commitment. The initial covenant has to be renewed and refreshed every day.

In this path of discipleship recognize that there will be foes within and without but make up your mind, like Jesus did, that you are going to reach the goal.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Luke 13:32; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 16-18; Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

18. PERSECUTION - Mistreatment but not Misery

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. **Hebrews 12:2-3***

Beaten, flogged, spat upon, slapped, mocked, insulted, laughed at, rejected, lied about, struck with fists, ridiculed. Persecution—on the cross Jesus faced it all. Physical and emotional torment—he endured it all, scorning its shame. Most amazing of all, he faced it for the joy set before him and stayed focused on that joy.

Throughout his life he faced persecution from his own family, village and authorities.

The cross reminds us of the world's response to Truth. We who follow him to the cross will get the same response from the world.

“In fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12)

How did Jesus go through persecution with grace? Even on the cross while suffering the most he forgave his tormentors, saved a robber who believed, provided for his mother. How could he do it? He entrusted himself to God who judges justly (**1 Peter 2:23**). He still believed God was in control.

How do you feel-- When someone rejects you? If there is an adverse report about you? When you are targeted and persecuted? Do you shrink back from evangelism? Do you feel sorry for yourself?

The only way to go about it is trusting in God and continuing to have love and concern for the lost.

If the roots of our hearts go deep into the word of God when persecution strikes we will not be shaken but instead it is going to bring the best out of us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Matthew 5:1-12; 13:1-23; Romans 8:28-39

19. IN THE WORKING WORLD-Lasting Impact

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **Col 3:1-3***

One of the greatest challenges a disciple faces is to live out the radical message of Christ in his workplace.

You might ask how would Jesus understand your present day corporate office. Look who all he had to deal with- masses of people were always following him, religious and governing authorities were always behind him, his family was very aggressive with him. He had all kinds of intimidating forces around him. And yet he was unwavering in his tasks.

The work environment usually encourages earthly things such as selfish ambition, greed, malice, lying, lust, sexual immorality, envy, jealousy and the like. It is one thing to stop committing these sins; it is quite another not to have your heart there.

Setting your heart is like pouring concrete into a foundation. Once it is set it is immovable.

Most of you spend most amount of time in your workplace and if you are not carrying the cross there how can you be living in the cross?

Setting your mind on things above is allowing God to meet our needs and not trusting in our own abilities and resources and power to do the same.

Ask yourselves regarding the work timings? Are you working to glorify God or to exalt yourself?

Col 3:23-²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,*"

Working to gain promotion, salary raise and more material possession are earthly goals. If your heart is set on pleasing God and you gain all these things then it is great.

Examine the motives of your heart. They get tested if you are asked to give up all these things for Jesus. Remember the Rich young Ruler(**Matt 19:16-30**).

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Daniel 1;4:19-37; Matt 23:1-12;Phil 1:27;James 2:1-13

20. IN THE FAMILY - Not for Adults Only

²⁵*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.* -**John 19:25-27**

Consider this scene of Mary seeing her first born being murdered in cold blood. How her *soul must have been pierced with a sword.*

Jesus showed his concern for his mother from the cross but did not protect her from the devastating pain of the whole experience. Why did he not use his power to shield her from all the pain she was facing?

Not only did he go through the cross he allowed his mother to face it too. Think why?

No relationship is exempt from the cost of discipleship.

At the Foot of the cross we learn: Families are for God. They exist for His plans and purposes.

The cross calls us to lay down our lives for Jesus in the full view of our families so that their lives can be saved.

Are your children witnessing how you love God? Do they see how you sacrifice your time, money, your sleep—for the Lost and the weak?

Do you teach your children to sacrifice?

We have been entrusted with the souls of our children. I pray that like Jesus we could lead our next generation to the cross and triumph.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Genesis 22:1-19; Deut 6:1-9; 1 Sam2:12-36; Matt 19:13-15; Luke 2:41-52

21. NATURE OF GOD- Nothing but the Best

¹⁷Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **1 Peter 1:17-19**

When Jesus' blood was shed on the cross, God was challenging us to reconsider our empty way of life and all of our empty philosophies. He opened his heart and revealed his Nature. He was imploring us from the cross to imitate him.

What a person gives reveals a lot about his nature. At the cross God gave his very best his one and only son.

Our sin demands such a precious and costly gift. God's costly gift demands a response. What is your response?

Are you motivated by God's mercy to strive for righteousness, self control, goodness, brotherly love, holiness, to grow in them continually?

Are you imitating God's attitude towards sin?

Hebrews 10:19-27 *Therefore brothers and sisters, since we have **confidence** to enter the Most Holy Place by the **blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a **sincere heart** and with the **full assurance** that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to **cleanse us from guilty conscience** and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us **hold unwaveringly to the hope** we profess for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may **spur one another toward love and good deeds**, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

If we deliberately keep on sinning after having received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Mark 14:1-9; Romans 12:12-21; 6:23; 14:19; Ephesians 4:1-6; Phil 4:8-9

22. FAITH - Trusting in Trial

²²“*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.*”

²³*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* **1 Peter 2:22-23**

Living by faith is not easy. We carefully plan our lives and like to be in control. We get security from our research and knowledge.

To follow Jesus we must live by Faith. That is risky and we do not like to take risks.

Faith is the assurance and certainty of things that we do not see, but we like to live by what we do not see.

Cross was faith testing for Jesus. Jesus prayed and trusted in the plan of God to resurrect him though he had not seen it. We see a faith that was tested, endured, stayed strong and was not disappointed.

The cross and resurrection gives us reason to have faith in all God's promises.

Faith accepts the situation and asks God for help and believes that God's power will be sufficient to see us through.

When others see our faith they are inspired to increase their faith.

What situations are you going through today that needs unwavering faith?

Do you see them as overwhelming burdens that God should not have allowed or do you see them as opportunities?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 Tim 1:8-12;4:6-8; Hebrews 4:14-16;11-12;1 Peter 1:3-9

23. LOVING THE LOST - Don't come down!

³⁹ *Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads*
⁴⁰ *and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it*
in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you
are the Son of God!" ⁴¹ *In the same way the chief priests, the*
teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² *"He saved*
others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of
Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will
believe in him. **Matt 27:39-42**

Jesus had spent his entire 33 years fighting to live a sinless life. The only man who had never sinned was dying for all men who had sinned. In a few hours it will be done. Redemption would have been complete.

But there on the cross while breathing his last he had to hear these humiliating words.

What if Jesus would have come down? Jesus could have saved himself. He could have called the army of angels at his command.

Was he tempted to save himself and let everyone else fend for himself? Anyway there was not one who was responding.

What if he thought that coming down from the cross would make people believe in him?

He had decided he would not come down unless everything was finished.

What kept him there?- If it is true that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son then it is also true that Jesus loves us so much that he died for us.

He saw our Lostness and responded with only the way we could be saved.

He calls us to continue to seek the lost he died to save. The mission is same. The cross is ours. There is no easy way to love. Loving the lost is always costly.

Are you tempted not to love the person next to you who has not known Jesus?

Are you tempted to give up reaching out to people because they are not open?

Are you tempted to give up discipling and counseling people because they do not repent or respond in gratefulness?

Do you keep on waiting for the person studying the Bible to become committed before taking the risk of baptizing (worried what if he is not committed after baptism)?

World is screaming “Come down from your Cross”. The blood of Jesus is pleading “hold on for just some more. It is nearly finished”. Your life will save someone. What are you going to do?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Luke 19:1-10; Romans 9:1-4;10:1-3;1 Cor 9:12-22

24. OVERCOMING - Turning the Tables

¹⁴ *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—***Heb 2:14**

Satan has a hold over us. He tempts us because of our desires.

We are short-sighted; we sinned and kept on sinning. We sin wholeheartedly and sometimes even if we do not want to do we do.

Jesus' presence in this world was an all out assault on death and Satan's plans.

He spoke about death (**John 5:21-30**). He claimed to be the only solution to death (**John 6:53-57**). He raised the dead (**John 11**). He believed his death will bring others to life (**John 12:23-25**).

Satan tried at every step from his birth to trip him. Jesus never fell into sin.

He was tempted and tested in every way as we were (Heb 4:15).

Today Satan has a chokehold on you. Wouldn't you like to get rid of his power over you?

The same Spirit that resurrected Jesus and lived in him lives in us (**Rom 8:11**).

These are some things you can do to turn the tables on Satan.

Pray- God is listening (**Heb 5:7**)

Read- God is speaking (**Luke 4:1-13**)

Believe- God is able (**Heb 2:18**)

Trust- God is willing (**Heb 4:15**)

Fight- God knows you can bear (**1 Cor 10:13**)

Seek- God has provided a way out (**1 Cor 10:13**)

Find- God gives grace in times of need (**Heb 4:16**)

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Gen 50:15-21; Daniel 3; 1 Cor 15:50-58; 2 Cor 2:10-11; Eph 6:10-18

25. PRAYER - Prayer and Purpose

³⁹ *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.* ⁴⁰ *On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation."* ⁴¹ *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,* ⁴² *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

Luke 22:39-42

At the foot of the cross we realize that prayer is a privilege that we have at the cost of the death of Jesus.

We can approach God confidently because of the cross.

What if Jesus did not drink from this cup?

What if God had taken this cup away from him?

Is prayer a chore for you?

Has it become boring for you?

Are you praying thoughtfully and carefully?

Remember what Jesus had to go through in order for us to be able to pray.

Jesus had a purpose to his prayer life. He needed God to give him strength to fulfill his mission on earth to save the Lost.

What is the purpose of your prayer? Is it for God to meet yours and your families' needs? Or are your prayers centered on helping others to find him?

Prayer is impossible without the cross of Christ. Let us be grateful for the privilege of prayer and for the purpose we have when we pray.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Mark 1:32-35; Luke 22:39-45; John 17; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-8; 13:15-16; Rev 5:8;8:4

26. HANDLING STRESS - I am not alone

³¹ “Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. ³² “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. **Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. John 16:31-32**

Stress is a catchword for the modern world. Everyone seems to have too much of this. How does a disciple deal with stress?

At the cross we learn how Jesus dealt with stress.

The days leading to his murder and the day of his crucifixion were massively stressful.

One of his faithful friends betrays him, his closest friend denies knowing him, his band of followers desert him.

Stress has many synonyms- worries, anxieties, frustrations, impatience that we relate to day in and day out.

But in Jesus we do not see any of these.

Who gave him this ability? How did he conquer stress?

In **John 16:31-32** Jesus understood he was not alone. His partner for stressful times was God himself.

Who is our partner in times of worry and frustration?

The secret of not getting stressed out is –FAITH.

Jesus knew and believed- “*I am not alone*”. What about you?

Jesus drove out the stress demons by God's presence in his life.

God is with us as he was with Jesus. We too can gain victory over stress and sin and claim “*I am not alone*”.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Romans 8:28-29; 2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-12; Phil 4:4-7; Hebrews 13:5-6.

27. RESURRECTION - Never Forget

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. 2 Tim 2:8

Remembering is not easy. We keep on reminding our kids and they forget easily. We forget things every day.

God has made us thus. He knows we forget easily and quickly.

The communion every Sunday reminds us of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We need to remember every moment of our life for what Resurrection has done for us.

It has given us a New Life (**Romans 6:4**). Are you living that new life in Christ or have you fallen back to your comfortable old self?

He has given us eternal life (**1 Peter 1:3-5**). Are you holding on to that inheritance or are you now seeking yours on earth?

We live on hope that one day we will unite with him in life if we unite with him in death.

“Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.” Don't ever forget. In the midst of pain, suffering, struggles, trials or challenges don't forget. Don't ever forget.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Isaiah 53:10-11; Romans 8:5-11;
1 Cor 15

28. JOY - Not Surprised by Joy

²*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* **Heb 12:2-3**

How can you be joyful when we are struggling and are in pain? When times are tough joy is something far from us.

At the foot of the cross we learn the secret of true Joy.

On the cross Jesus was rejected by many friends, his health was destroyed, as for prosperity- lots were cast for his only clothes; he was being mocked and murdered; there was no glory but shame.

Yet joy filled Jesus' heart as he knew what was set before him. He knew God was in control.

When we take up God's role, we want to control the outcome; we want everything figured out the way we want is when we lose our joy.

For Jesus there is a joy-producing freedom and peace in acceptance of God's plan and protection. Throughout the last days of his life on earth Jesus prayed for his disciples to have the full measure of his joy (**John 17:13**).

If we do not have this Joy we become bitter and cynical, lacking in trust.

When I do not trust God is when I become anxious and critical. I land up in depression.

Gratefulness springs from a trusting heart and gives birth to joy. You can choose to have list of things you are grateful about or a list of all the people and things you do not like.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and he longs to fill you with it as you trust in God (**Romans 15:13**).

Isaiah 53:11 says *“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.”*

What steals your joy today? What is the excuse for your lack of joy? Are you blaming it on circumstances for your lack of joy?

Fix your eyes on Jesus at the Cross. He will teach you to have true joy, to trust, to be grateful.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Job 6:10; Psalm 5:11; 19:8; 28:7; 51:12; John 15:11; 16:20-22; 17:13; Romans 8:18; 14:17; 2 Cor 8:2; 1 Thess 1:6; James 1:2

29. RECONCILIATION - Consumed with Reconciliation

Eph 2:14-16-¹⁴*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,* ¹⁵*by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,* ¹⁶*and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

What we see today in our world is a reflection of our alienation from God. The more men are alienated from God the more there will be hostilities and enmities. Prejudice, hatred, divorce, violence is a fruit of our distance from God.

God is always consumed with reconciliation. The cross is the greatest demonstration of God's desire to reconcile.

What stops reconciliation- isn't it pride that causes fault finding, What do we see at the cross is Jesus consumed with the desire to reconcile the most vile of men to God- (*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*”). If he has to find fault he would never have died for us.

Man in his pride finds fault with others and with God (Remember how Adam insinuated that God by putting Eve in his life caused his fall).

It is only when humble man or woman meets the humble God that reconciliation occurs.

The only way to reconcile a conflict is to look at it through the eyes of Jesus. Is Reconciliation going to be more important for you than anything else?

We need to have the spirit of **1Cor 6:7** -rather be cheated or wronged than have a conflict in the body of Christ.

Jesus was consumed with reconciliation at the cross. Are you passionate to humble yourself before God and man?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Matt 5:23-24; 1 Cor 6:1-11; Gal 6:1-2; Eph 4:31-32; 1 Peter 1:22-23

30. UNITY - Level Grounds - United Hearts

²⁰ *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

John 17:20-21

God wants his people united. Cross reveals what extent God is willing to go to produce unity.

Even for worldly and unrighteous ambitions men have shown the power of Unity(**Gen 11- Tower of Babel**).

Unity among the disciples is a witness to the world about Jesus.

What are the obstacles to unity?-Misunderstandings, selfish ambition, competition, jealousy and envy, insecurity, inferiority, ingratitude, bitterness.

Sin is the ultimate cause of all disunity- forgiveness is the ultimate cure.

What better than the cross to demonstrate forgiveness.

Unity is dynamic. It has to be continually renewed.

Who do you think you are not united with- your spouse, your child, brother or sister in the church, anyone else in the workplace, any relative?

Is your conscience clear before man and God regarding relationships?

Are you making every effort to be united?

The example and the blood of Jesus provide everything we need for love and unity with all who stand there with us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: John 17, 1 Cor 1, Eph 2, 4:1-13; Phil 2:1-18