

Meaning of the Cross

by Elisabeth Elliot

The cross is a symbol of suffering, but also of glory and a meeting place between God and us, and it is through suffering that we learn obedience and are made perfect.

Duration: 1:19:31

Scripture: Matthew 16:24

Topics: "Crucified With Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of living a life of surrender and sacrifice as a follower of Jesus. He shares a story about a psychologist who owned ice cream parlors and intentionally hired polite and well-dressed young people, demonstrating that abundance is a form of worship. The speaker also mentions the need for Christians to not just make claims but to show the life of Jesus through their actions. He highlights the example of missionary Amy, who was challenged by an old man to demonstrate the life of Jesus after her preaching. The sermon concludes with a discussion on Jesus' refusal to perform miracles for his own benefit and the importance of accepting and embracing the will of God.

Transcript

Meaning of the cross. We can never get beyond the need to remind ourselves of what the cross means. I believe that God wants the cross to cut deeply, like a sword, into the life of every one of us.

So when I speak of the meaning of the cross, I'm speaking of the deep, personal meaning of that tremendous symbol of our faith. When I was a little child, I began to love the hymns about the cross. I'm sure that many times when people ask me, what is your favorite hymn, I've said, beneath the cross of Jesus.

It was when I was about 14 years old that I realized that I was lying when I sang that hymn. Because as it stands, it says, I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place. I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face.

And I thought, I know a whole lot of kinds of sunshine that I would like, that I would ask for, besides just the sunshine of the face of Jesus. But I've learned that in these very exalted expressions of spiritual desire, that we can't always be honest in saying them, but we can make them a prayer. And so I sing these hymns, not lying, but just saying, Lord, help me to be able to say this in honesty, make this real in

my life.

But it was many more years before I thought deeply about the meaning of those words, and the whole hymn is an attempt to show that the cross, which is a symbol of suffering, and it means torture, doesn't it? The cross on which Jesus was nailed was the instrument of execution back in Jesus' time. And I'm sure many of you today are wearing a little gold cross around your neck. Well, can you imagine wearing a little gold electric chair around your neck? We would think that was the most horrible thought.

And yet, the cross was the instrument of torture and death in Jesus' time. But he has transformed that instrument for all of us, for all of time, so that we can actually sing, in the cross of Christ, of glory, towering over the rest of time. That's another one of the great hymns about the cross.

Back to Beneath the Cross of Jesus, what Elizabeth Clefane, the author of that hymn, was pointing out to us is that it was the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way. Did you ever think of the cross as a shadow from the heat, a home in the wilderness, a rest on the way? And then he describes it and says, Upon that cross of Jesus my eye at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me. And from my smitten heart appears two wonders, I confess, the wonders of his glorious love and my own worthlessness.

Modern linguists have mostly changed that last word to my unworthiness, but it was more powerful than that in the original version, my own worthlessness. And then he puts a stanza about a trusting place. I have to stop and think now.

It's about a meeting place between God and us and actually a comfort and a rest. The whole stanza is about a rest and a place, a trusting place between God and man. In other words, a meeting place.

We come to the cross as Christians did in Pilgrim's Progress. And if you haven't read John Benjamin's Pilgrim's Progress, I strongly recommend it to you. Read it yourself, read it to your children, read it and reread it, because it is a description of the whole Christian life.

And when the Pilgrim, the Christian, reached the cross, he had been carrying a tremendously heavy burden of sin. And when he got to the cross, the story tells us that this burden just fell out his back and rolled down the hill of Calvary and into the tomb. And he looked up at the cross and he said, He has given me rest by his sorrows and life by his death.

God gives us rest through the cross. There are two great principles that the understanding of the cross comprises. And this first talk will be about the first one, which is relinquishment.

The second is acceptance. Relinquishment and acceptance. And do you remember what the three conditions for discipleship are? When Jesus said, If you want to be my disciple, you must do two things, three things.

Number one, deny yourself. That sounds very dangerous in this day and age, doesn't it? We get all twitchy and worried because that's denial. And if you're in denial, then of course you really need some professional help.

Well, let's take the word of Jesus. We need denial. And what he means by that is giving up our right to ourselves.

That's another translation. If you want to be my disciple, you must give up your right to yourself. Is that easy? I think it's the hardest thing for any of us to do for all of our lives.

It doesn't matter how long we have walked with the Lord. There isn't a day that goes by that God isn't going to give us the opportunity to give up our right to ourselves. And that's death.

The long and the short of it, it's death. We have to die to ourselves. Not just once, but again and again and again.

The second condition is take up the cross. That means excellence. And follow me.

And that means obedience. We've been singing songs about worship. And I hear that word a great deal more nowadays in churches than I ever heard it in the church in which I grew up.

The word wasn't used. We did it, of course. But we didn't talk about worship.

Or sing about, I really want to worship you, Lord. And things like that. And there was a rather staggering claim made in one of those songs that we heard this morning.

That I will stand and worship you all night long and all day too. And I think of how relatively easy it is to sing about worshiping. Write about worshiping.

Talk about worshiping. And even pray about worshiping. By comparison with the highest form of worship.

Do you know what the highest form of worship is? It's not singing and talking and praying and writing. It's obedience. Obedience is the highest form of worship.

Sometimes I think that when we make breathtaking claims in our songs, if we were attuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit, He might be saying to us, Don't tell me. Show me. When Amy Carmichael was a new missionary in India, she had been itinerating and giving out the gospel by interpretation.

And an old man came up to her after one of her talks and he said, We have heard your words. Now, can you show us the life of your Lord Jesus? And years later when she was a missionary in India, she was in India for 53 years without a furlough, almost exactly the same thing happened again. She had been speaking many times in that village, and an old man came up to her and he said, We have heard the preaching.

Can you now show us the life of your Lord Jesus? And that's what the world is looking for, ladies. If every woman in this room this morning came to the Holy Cross and gave up her right to herself, it would change the state of California. There's no telling the ripple effects of that kind of commitment.

God is calling us to relinquishment. And that means saying no to ourselves. Relinquishment is no to myself.

I give up my right to myself. And I say, not my will, but thine be done. There are many kinds of relinquishment out there.

Jesus relinquished everything that he had endured in heaven and came to earth as a helpless baby. The Lord of the universe relinquished all that power, all that omnipotence, all that omniscience, all that omnipresence, because omnipresence, of course, means to be everywhere at the same time. And God is

omnipresent.

But Jesus became a little baby, helpless, swollen baby. He could not have survived without his mother. He gave up all of that glory.

Another one of my favorite hymns when I was a little girl was Out of the Ivory Palaces. A hymn about his relinquishment. Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe, for only his great eternal love made my Savior well.

So we follow our Lord Jesus when we relinquish our right to ourselves. The Apostle Paul was able to say, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. We've been crucified with Christ. It hurts.

What else do we expect? So often we hear people talk about, well, I don't know why so-and-so has to suffer the way she does. She's such a good person. I don't know why the Lord let this happen to him.

He's such a marvelous man. I don't know why the Lord lets famines and floods and earthquakes and fires happen and little children be aborted. Of course, we must bow in the acknowledgement that we are up against mystery.

But it's not total mystery when it comes to human suffering, especially the suffering of Christians. In my book called A Path Through Suffering, I have an appendix which gives at least 28 different reasons that the Bible has given us by way of explanation as to why we must suffer. Well, part of it is in order that we might know Christ.

The Apostle Paul said he only wanted one thing in the world. He said, one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

And there couldn't have been a resurrection without the crucifixion. You and I cannot rise into new life with Jesus Christ without giving up our right to ourselves. Now let's be very clear about this, that we have an option.

We don't have to give up our right to ourselves unless we want to be a follower of Jesus. I remember hearing Henry Grant, the psychologist, tell about owning four ice cream parlors back in the 60s, I guess it was, when everything had fallen apart and there were no manors left. And he decided that in those ice cream parlors he would have good-looking, clean-cut, nicely-dressed, polite young people.

And again and again customers would come to him and say, where in the world do you get all these nice-looking, nicely-dressed, clean-cut young people? They're so courteous. Where do you find them? And he said, we don't find them, we make them. And he said one of the first things he did when a young boy would come in looking for a job, he would show them a picture of a boy with a nice haircut.

And he'd say, now this is the way you're going to wear your hair. No explanation verbally, but just, look, you just look at this picture, this is the way you're going to have your hair. And the boy would say, you're going to tell me how I can wear my hair.

And he said, no, not unless you want to work here. These are the conditions. And the girls had to wear stockings, decent-looking shoes.

And he said invariably a girl would come to work the first day, she didn't have any stockings on, she didn't have the right shoes, and he'd say, well, you go home and get the right ones. She'd say, go home? I need all the way across town, takes me an hour and a half to get here. He'd say, well, make sure you don't make the same mistake again.

We'll see you around. It's an option. If you want to follow Jesus Christ, then you give up your rights yourself.

And that means, I am not my own anymore. That's what it says in 1 Corinthians 6. You are not your own, you are God with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

And it is in this physical body. Mine happens to be tall and urgent and Anglo-Saxon and female, and that's the only body in which I am here in this world to glorify God. But I am not my own.

I am his property. And that explains a whole lot of things. When we ask why, let's remember I turned over the rights to Jesus Christ.

I told him I wanted his will and not mine. Jesus was helpless as a baby. He was followed by multitude but not because of the words he spoke.

He was followed because of the loaves and fishes that he gave out and the miracles that people wanted to see. And he was challenged and argued with and hated and ultimately captured, blindfolded, flogged, slapped, crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross. Reminiscence, humiliation.

Do we understand the cross in our everyday lives? In Luke 18.31, Jesus is telling the disciples exactly what is going to happen. He says, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles.

They will knock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again. Now, this is not the first time that Jesus has explained this to his disciples.

Verse 34 says, the disciples did not understand any of this. It's meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about. Isn't it amazing that the twelve disciples whom Jesus had personally chosen to follow him, to walk with him, to watch the miracles, to hear him pray, to eat with him and to go up into the mountains and the woods with him.

Those who most intimately observed his life they didn't know what he was talking about. They did not know what he was talking about. And in Matthew 16.21 we have a similar passage.

Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. And that he must be killed. Would you ever stop to think about the necessity that we find here the will of God who created the world who can do anything he wants to.

And Jesus was put under necessity at the hands of men. At their whims. At the mercy of their hatred.

He must go to Jerusalem, must suffer, must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. And Peter said to him just what you and I would have said if we had been there and we took him aside and began to rebuke him. Never Lord, he said, this shall never happen to you.

Another translation said, God forbid that such a thing should ever happen to you. And Jesus' reaction is rather startling, isn't it? He turns to him, to Peter whom he has just called a rock a few verses ahead of this. He says, I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.

And the gates of hell are not overcoming I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Tremendous responsibility that he's offering to Peter. But when Peter says never Lord, this shall never happen to you Jesus turns and says to Peter get behind me safe.

You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men. What was at the heart of Peter's objection? Encouragement to self-pity.

He wanted Jesus to protect himself. To feel sorry for himself. To escape the suffering he was appointed.

And so Peter is siding with Satan. Satan loves self-pity. If he can just get us in a swamp and a quagmire feeling so sorry for poor little me what have I done to deserve this? He is tickled to death.

He just loves it. Because self-pity is satanic. It is satanic.

And it is one thing that we women are likely to be subject to. And that we have to fight with everything we've got tooth and nail in order to deny ourselves the sad, sweet, stinking sympathy of self-pity. And I have to confess that that phrase comes from my old Bible teacher, Richard Maxwell at the Prayer Bible Institute in Canada.

I remember after there had been a long, supposedly prayer session the kids got up and they confessed all sorts of ridiculous trivial little things that they were very sorry about and didn't really want to hear about. And when the prayer meeting was all over he just got up and he said Oh Lord, deliver us from our sad, sweet, stinking selves. Remember, when you feel sorry for yourself you're siding with Satan.

Then Jesus said to his disciples If anyone would come after me he must deny himself. Take up his cross and follow me. For whoever last saved his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for me will find it. And you know, Jesus said that. Jim Elliot said he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

I couldn't tell you how many people have told me that's the most wonderful truth. How did Jim Elliot ever come up with that? Well, he read the Bible. Nothing really original in the concept.

Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me will find it. Relinquishment is the willingness to lose your life.

To lose your reputation. To lose control over your children. I couldn't tell you how many letters I get from my radio listeners with sad stories about difficulties mixed in loss because the parents never let go and back off and shut up.

Now I am very grateful that God has given me the privilege of being a mother-in-law and I have a most unusual son-in-law who actually asks for advice sometimes. And I try not to fish it out until he does ask.

But that's one of the big relinquishments, isn't it? And when your first child goes off to the first grade or to nursery school or wherever you may send him out of your home, that's a relinquishment, isn't it? I'll never forget this a few days before my daughter Valerie was going to college.

I thought this was really the first big separation because she was never going to welcome home. She did go to public school for part of her education. But I realized she's going to college, this is it as far as her ever going around home very much anymore.

She may be here a little bit in summertime and as it worked out she did get married as soon as she graduated from college. But it was a tremendously painful thing to realize she's grown up, my job is practically over and I have to relinquish her to God. Do we understand the cross? The disciples wouldn't.

We don't. Let's understand here that suffering is a necessity. It says in Hebrew that Jesus learned obedience by the things that he suffered.

There's a mystery. The spotless Son of God had to learn obedience. Not by the things he enjoyed, by the things that he suffered.

So if we're ever, ever tempted to say why do I have to suffer? Let's forget that question and ask the question who do I think I am? That I should be exempt. My Lord Jesus learned obedience through the things which he suffered and it says in Hebrew 2.10 he is the captain of our salvation who was made perfect through what? Suffering. Perfect through suffering.

The necessity of suffering if we are going to be followers. That is what the cross is about. Give up your right to yourself.

Now this means a radically different mindset. And I brought along a letter which is one of the most amazing and unusual letters that I've gotten and I get hundreds of very amazing letters. But I can't resist reading you this letter by way of illustration of this radically different mindset, a total turnaround in a woman's life.

The story is, she says, that my marriage of 33 years was ending. There was no communication in preparation to finish that painful marriage that not only ruined my life but also ruined my two boys at 30 and 27. The past was scary and painful the future did not seem better so I started to cry to God please heal my marriage.

I pleaded to God for about a month. God told me through you, go and treat your husband as you would treat Jesus. Call him Lord and serve him.

Now I want to assure you that that is not an Elizabeth Elliott idea. I've got that out of the Bible too. Because it's too preposterous isn't it? Can you imagine telling somebody who's had a terrible marriage for 33 years, well start treating him as you would Jesus and call him Lord.

Where did I get that? Well it says in 1 Peter 3 in speaking of how women who are married to non-Christian husbands are supposed to treat them take Sarah as your example. She called him Lord. She called Abraham Lord and would not give way to hysterical fears.

The letter goes on. I did not have anything to lose so I decided to try. I went home.

He was still sitting in his chair like a mummy not even blinking watching the TV. I hate that scene. But I controlled myself and very respectfully asked if I could talk to him for a moment.

He immediately to my surprise switched the TV off and listened. What do you say next to Jesus? You ask forgiveness right? So I did. I told him how understanding I was, how un-understanding I was how stupid I was and how wrong I was my whole life and asked him for his forgiveness even though he had decided not to continue our marriage.

Another surprise. He said that he loved me and always loved me and wanted to do because he felt he was a burden to me and our family. Since he is not working smoking and drunk previously he feels inadequate in himself and it has nothing to do with me.

Then I told him how important it is him being with us and in the house for me also for the boys and thus I understood how our communication was distorted because of our own distorted feelings about each other. We are still the same people but our home is based on God's teaching and whenever I am angry with him and want to put him down I remember how would I treat him if he was Jesus. My whole approach changes.

My words are so different. I sang with love and respect. Do you know what? With more than one month it has never happened before in 33 years we have not had a fight.

I do not have cramps in my stomach when he opens his mouth to speak. I dearly love him, accept him as he is and gladly do what he asks me to do. I listen and respect his ideas even though they are 180 degrees different from mine and I also have the courage to speak my ideas but try to say them in a way that will not offend him.

Hard work but worth it. Elizabeth there is such a peace in my house I never never had. The house was built by Jesus and it will stand forever.

I thank God. P.S. I try not to hurt my husband but I am not always successful so I tell him I am sorry the same day. Just as the Bible teaches I also talk about my hurts with him and solve them the same day.

Oh how it works well. My only regret is that I did not know it sooner. God has promised to restore my past and my trusty will.

I love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Now I managed to track this lady down and I called her on the phone and I said may I read your letter? May I make it public? And she said of course. Well it had been four months and I said how is it going now? Better every day she said.

I live with Jesus. What did she relinquish? Her right to be right. Is there any of us that doesn't want to be right? I've had people say to me more than once you always have to be right don't you? And I want to say have you ever met anybody that wants to be wrong? I never have.

But I'm sure I come across as though I think I am right all the time and I know that that's very far from the truth. But this woman gave up her right to herself. She gave up her right to apologies from her husband.

And how many times do we stand on our rights and say well it's his fault he did it and I'm going to wait until he apologizes to me because he knows he was wrong. And you can lie in bed with the tears running into your ears and he's not going to budge. He's going to snore.

He'll be snoring before you ever think about it. This lady lost her life and found it. We are so afraid that we're going to lose our rights that we're going to lose respect, we're going to lose ground if we do the right thing.

Whoever loses his life will find it. And she found a totally new life and a totally new husband all by that one simple principle and it comes from Matthew 25 40. Jesus said inasmuch as you have done it for one of the least of these my brothers you have done it for me.

Your husband is one of his brothers. Do it for Jesus. Now Jesus of course happened to be talking about little tiny children at that time.

It doesn't make any difference who it is. How we treat anybody is how we are treating Jesus. Inasmuch as you did not do it for the least of these my brothers, you did not do it for me.

Someone has said marriage is the furniture of your life. Now that's not something that people remind the bride of because she's coming down the aisle. She's coming down the aisle with one object in mind.

That beloved face down there. She doesn't care about anything else. There he is and she's about to give herself to him totally in the presence of God and witnesses forever.

In sickness or in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse. She's not worried about sickness and she's not worried about poorer and she's not worried about worse. That will come.

What she thinks is a prize package is going to be a surprise package. But if in our premarital counseling we could just simply sit these two people down and say to them, you each are forfeiting your life. You are giving up your life to this person and for this person.

Because love means two things. The intention of unity. And I'm going to have to bow to myself if I intend to maintain and foster unity between myself and my husband Lars who is standing at the back door there giving me counseling.

And the other thing is the intention of the good of the beloved. Concern for the good of the beloved. Intention of unity concern for the good of the beloved.

The lady whose letter I read just knew that nothing was going to work and they were going to be divorced. And she thought, well what do I have to do? And I will try what Elizabeth said. Which Elizabeth got straight out of Matthew 25 40.

Amy Carmichael says in her little gem of a book called If and I recommend you Amy Carmichael's books. Start reading her and you can forget about reading Elizabeth Elliott because I feel with everything I know I learned from Amy Carmichael now it's a slight exaggeration but she wrote a book which is a masterpiece. Very thin book with one sentence on each page.

And one of them says If I refuse to take the second place or the 20th without making a fuss then I know nothing. Calvary is love. Relinquishment.

We relinquish control over our children and any of us who have been seeking to control our husbands it's time to let go of that. Because God did not appoint us as their moral custodians. We are not in charge of our husbands morality.

We can pray for them and we have another weapon besides prayer which is a gentle and quiet spirit. And I get many many letters from women telling me all these terrible things that their husbands are doing or all the wonderful things they should be doing that they're not doing. Confessing their husbands sins to me and telling me don't you think I'm right.

And it may very well be sin of course but since when did God appoint us over our husbands? It's not in the book. This book says the husband is the head of the wife. So forget the control of your husband forget the control of your children once they have grown up I have to try not to try to control my grandchildren do all kinds of things I want for my grandchildren.

I want to teach them things. I want to show them things and I do that and my daughter wants me to, my son-in-law wants me to but I have to be careful. My oldest grandson has a haircut which is not my idea.

He did not consult me on that. And I haven't told him how he really ought to wear it. I just gave him one little hint that I said you know I think you're so handsome I can't see as much of your face as I'd like to.

And he takes it with a good spirit and just laughs it off, oh well that's granny talking. Relinquish a desire for things that God is not giving you. Marriage for example, what about that? Will you just offer it to Jesus Christ? Open your hands and let it go and say Lord I want what you want to give me.

You know what's best for me. I relinquish this heated, totally preoccupying insistent desire that controls my life. Many young women who have as it were put their lives on hold waiting for a man.

The Bible says wait on the Lord. God knows if marriage is a good thing for you and God knows if it's not. You may be asking for stone when you think it's bread.

Relinquishment of work done for God. Some of you know the story of how in my very first year as a missionary I reduced a certain tribal language to writing. It was a hard job.

It took me a better part of nine months just to reduce it to writing. That's a long way from translating the Bible but that's the first step. But nine months' worth was in one suitcase and it was stolen.

There were no Xeroxes in those days and no tape recorders. We prayed that God would get the suitcase back. I never got it back.

I did that work for God and I'm willing to relinquish my rights over what I do for God if it seems to come to nothing. If nobody ever appreciates it. If nobody ever says thank you.

If nobody ever gets to benefit by it. God never wastes a servant's time. Relinquishment of my rights.

And there are some people here this morning who are full of bitterness. I don't know who you are but somebody did something unforgivable and you are not going to forgive that person at least until she apologizes. And the chances are she's not going to.

She was taught us to pray, to give us our trespasses as we forgive those who apologize. The cross cuts deeply. If we come to the cross of Jesus we must open our hands.

Let go. Let God take over your life. Give Him yourself.

Give Him your rights. Die. Just go ahead and die.

And again to quote my Bible teacher Mr. Maxwell, a lady came up to him one time and she said Oh Mr. Maxwell I'm so scared that maybe the Lord might call me to be a missionary, a foreign missionary. I don't want to be a foreign missionary. She said I think I would just die if He did that.

And Mr. Maxwell put his hand on the lady's shoulder and he said Do both sister. You'll never be any good as a missionary or as a servant of the Lord until you die. Give up your right to an apology.

Die to yourself. Let it go. He that loses his life for my sake shall find God bless you.

Now the two things that Jesus demonstrated so unequivocally for us are relinquishment and acceptance when He went to the cross. He gave up all rights when He came into this world as a helpless baby and He relinquished all for the Father. And He prayed in Gethsemane Not my will but Thine be done.

And that should be the note of our lives similar to that of Mary when Mary received that visitor telling her that she was to be the mother of the Son of God. Mary's response was an instant one of total relinquishment of her own plans. How could she possibly imagine trying to explain to Joseph that she had not been unfaithful to him.

And as you recall in the story Joseph did believe that she had been unfaithful because the Bible says that he being a righteous man was going to put her away privately because of course in Jewish law he could not marry a fornicator. How would she explain to the people in the town? How would she explain to her parents her pregnancy? But we find not a word of self defense on Mary's part. God took care of explaining to Joseph.

He sent an angel to make that clear. But Mary relinquished her plans You can imagine, you can only try to imagine the shock of having that kind of a visitor and that kind of an announcement. But she opened her hands and that should be our attitude through all of life toward Christ.

Open hands. Letting go of what God wants to take and receiving what God wants to give. And we cannot receive what he wants to give until we have let go of what he wants to take.

So relinquishment and acceptance are the great principles of the cross. Now look at the demands of the incarnation. He put himself in a position where he was hungry.

He was weary. He was thirsty. He never owned a home.

He was an itinerant rabbi in the only three years that we know very much about. We can only assume that he must have worked hard in the carpenter shop with his foster father Joseph. And I think that when he says I do the works that I see my father do, he was of course referring to his heavenly father but as a little boy he had to learn from Joseph how to use tools.

The hammer and the saw and the adze. And Jesus probably said just what any little boy says when he's trying to learn something from his dad. Is this right dad? Is this the way I hold it? Is this what I do? And his father corrects and corrects and corrects.

And Jesus was a little boy. A little helpless boy to start with. He was not omnipotent.

The Bible says he could not do many mighty works in certain places because of their unbelief. Staggering isn't it to think that the one who created the heavens and the stars is helpless because of the lack of faith on the part of the people to whom he spoke. And I just want to give you just an inkling of his power when

the Bible says he made the stars talk about a laconic understatement and he made the stars as if it was sort of not as simple as scrambling some eggs or baking a cake.

Well I just learned a few years a couple of years ago about one star that's in the constellation of Scorpio which can be seen low on the summer horizon. It's a pinkish super giant star. 390 times the size of the sun.

And the sun, some of you know is one and a quarter million times the size of the earth. Can you comprehend that? I'm lost when I get past a million. A million and a quarter is a bit much.

This star is 390 times the size of the sun which is one and a quarter million times the size of the earth. So some of you can do that in your head how big that star is. But if you take a hollow rubber ball cut it in half and let that ball represent this star called Antares then you can put inside the ball Venus, Mercury and Mars and the earth and the sun.

And Venus and Mercury and Mars and the earth will continue their orbits around the sun without touching the inside of that rubber ball. That's the size of one star. One star.

And when I heard a Scottish preacher tell this, this is where I learned it from a tape and he ended this staggering bit of news, this incomprehensible tremendous size he said there are pebbles on the shores of a great ocean of space and time where light swims through a billion years from island universe to island universe and of all that stellar magnitude the Bible says in beautiful understatement he made the stars also.

They are the work of his feet no tiny little hands were helpless and ultimately were nailed immobile for you and me relinquishment acceptance of the will of his father look at Jesus first of all he never performed the miracle to lift the constraints of his own humanity what was Satan's temptation to him in the wilderness Jesus had been fasting for 40 days he was very hungry and Satan came to him and took advantage instantly of that moment of weakness and suggested that why not command the stones to be made bread Jesus never once performed a miracle for his own good to lift the constraints of his humanity nobody else can turn stones into bread now he did miracles, he turned water into wine but it wasn't for himself he never did it for himself he never broke the hardness of his listener's

hearts he could have, couldn't he but he was God that he had accepted, he had totally accepted from his father's hand his will that he should be a human being a man living in a man's body, a Jewish body for 33 years walking here on earth getting his feet dusted, becoming so tired he had to sit down by the well thirsty on the cross his own disciples did not know what he was talking about they did not understand he lived, as someone has said his chains to the terrible end he lived his chains to the terrible end now I can't see anybody here at the moment that's handicapped, but I'm sure there must be somebody I see a couple of walkers so somebody around here has a little trouble with walking without some help and I'm sure that there are a number of people with many different kinds of

handicaps you would love to get rid of those chains of constraints, wouldn't you my husband has glaucoma and glaucoma invariably and predictably leads to blindness unless you take drops now they can't ever guarantee that you take the drops regularly and faithfully, that you never will go blind but you certainly can ward it off for a while ten times a day my husband has to take drops, that's a constraint and ten times a day he has to keep his eyes closed for five minutes and hold his tear ducts like this for five minutes fifty minutes a day well that's, as you would say, I can imagine afterwards you can say, you know I

just meant the math that's nothing, he never makes a fuss about it always thanking God that he can still see and just makes nothing of it time after time, we've just seated

ourselves in a restaurant just when the waitress comes, there's my husband sitting like this the stewardess said on the plane yesterday well you were in profound meditation, so I decided not to bother well you can't be explaining to everybody all the time everything can you but it's just a little thing I don't know what your chains may be, maybe they're emotional maybe they're mental, maybe they're spiritual maybe they're physical maybe they're all of the above have you ever accepted what cannot be changed? it cannot be changed there are a whole lot of things in our lives that cannot be changed the woman whose letter I read to you this morning could not change her husband and God knew she had tried and I suppose that every one of us who's ever had a husband could think of one or two tiny

suggestions that we might make which would make them the perfect husband that we thought we were getting and I have been married to three very very different men very different now put your minds at ease, the first two are in heaven I've not been divorced ever but God has given me tests in learning to be submissive to three very very different kinds of men these are the circumstances in which God has put me relinquishment means no to myself acceptance means yes to God yes Lord, I'll take it I used to think it was a terrible cross to bear that I was as tall as I am when I was 12 years old now most girls do stop growing when they're 12 years old but when you're 5 feet 9 and 12 years old and all the boys are about up to here in the 8th grade, it's extremely embarrassing and I used to think

that was a great handicap well, I've long since learned to thank God for the circumstances now there are many things in our lives which we cannot change you have nothing to do with the date of your birth which means you have absolutely nothing to do with the fact that you are old now some of you I'd like to ask you, when does middle age begin? well the Bible says that a normal lifespan is 70 years so middle age is 35 you didn't want to hear that, did you? and after that you're old for the life of me, I cannot understand Christian women who hate that thought why? it was God's idea, it wasn't yours in the beautiful hymn by Joseph Addison there's a stanza that says through every period of my life thy goodness I'll pursue and after death and distant worlds the glorious theme renew now this

period of my life, I am not only old but some people would say I'm elderly I'm not getting older any more than anybody else your 3 month old baby is getting older at the same rate that I am so we are all getting older but what is it I just heard that's politically correct that we've been saying wrong oh yes they've changed the name of the retirement home it's not for old people any more, it's for older people it's not aged but aging well I'm aged and I'm old and I thank God for this but it's one of the circumstances of my life that I had no choice about I had nothing whatsoever to do with it I didn't have anything to do with my parents, who they were what color I was going to be, what height I was going to be what my handicaps might turn out to be my brains my temperament, my

idiosyncrasies my peculiarities, my personality these are God's assignment and one of my life verses is Psalm 16 5 Lord you have assigned me my portion and my cup and have made my lot secure I can't tell you what piece I give you everything is assigned, apportioned bestowed, given now if I am going to make that an offering back to Jesus Christ for thanksgiving what do I have to do first I cannot offer my old age until I have accepted it and received it with both hands and said yes Lord I'll take it and now I will offer it back to you with thanksgiving and so it's a continuous cycle my life is an offering I relinquish my right to myself, my hands are open as I relinquish I receive what God wants to give me and so my life becomes praise every minute of every day some of my work is house

cleaning some of it is cooking, some of it is speaking some of it is preparing radio talks, some of it is writing books do you think God's more impressed when I'm sitting at the computer writing a book than he is when I'm making applesauce I don't think so because making applesauce happens to be the thing he wants me to do at that moment and so the circumstances of my life dictate certain things I have a husband so I have certain obligations and duties to him which I say yes Lord about when I was first widowed it was the last thing in the world that I wanted I can't imagine anybody wanting the gift of widowhood but God taught me that it was a gift Jim and I had been in love for five and a half years before God brought us together we had 27 months of marriage so I was a widow I'd had the

gift of singleness to begin with and I'd had the wonderful gift that I'd always longed for which was marriage and then God gave me the unspeakable gift of motherhood and then I became a widow yes Lord, inacceptance, life, peace a poem by Amy Carmichael inacceptance, life, peace I couldn't change the fact that I was a widow Jim was not coming back I could be resentful, I could hate God I could shake my fist in his face and tell him I'm not going to trust you anymore or I could lose my life and say yes Lord and through that I'd find it and I know peace and joy and freedom I don't know what you may be chafing about that you know you can't change you cannot change your husband, you might as well quit trying accept their prayer and possibly by a gentle and quiet spirit you might chances are

God doesn't want to change him the way you want him to be changed God might be working on you to change some things now some of you don't have a husband and you're a little tired of hearing about all this and some of you are very glad you don't have a husband when you used to have one but there are some of you who are eating your hearts out because you've never had one and it doesn't look as though you're ever going to get one and I'm very serious when I say this is where the cross cuts deeply into our hearts my heart goes out to the hundreds of beautiful young Christian women that my husband and I meet everywhere we go where are the godly Christian men you'd all like to know the answer to that one but singleness is something to be accepted yes Lord it's none of my business whether next

Wednesday he's going to bring along the man of my dreams that's not my business only today is my business sometimes people say to me well how do I know if I have the gift of singleness well I say what day is this well it's Friday okay are you single today yes you have the gift of singleness only God knows if it's a permanent gift you don't have to ask him that he'll show you I certainly thought that my widowhood was a permanent gift I never imagined getting a second husband I thought it was a miracle I got the first one so when the second one came along 13 years later I thought well I'll probably be widowed again because he was 18 years older than I and I was widowed again after four and a half years of marriage well that was the end of it as far as I was concerned my mind was totally

shut so when Lars Grenn came after me in a very southern gentlemanly way deliberate speed patience my mind was shut the Lord was beginning to say to me when I could see that Lars was closing in for the kill you have not asked me one thing about this that's what God was saying you have not even prayed how do you know that I don't want you to marry this man well I don't know Lord I couldn't imagine that you did but might you well he did my marital status is a gift I am a wife now and that is a gift to be received with thanksgiving and offered back to be with Christ now I don't know what the hardest thing in your life is of course I don't maybe nobody else does either maybe you have something in your life that you cannot speak of to anyone you would dare not speak of it that's where the

cross has its deep and personal meaning it means suffering doesn't it it means death to myself perhaps to my dreams perhaps to my ambitions perhaps to what I hoped for my children and that hurts a lot of us

perhaps something else that I can't even imagine someone has written this everyone offering himself to God must offer the glory of life in himself whether it be through giving it up or rejoicing in it whatever the offering may be whether it's giving something up or rejoicing in something or through a renunciation or an embrace there are certain things in our lives that we have to renounce we certainly renounce sin in the name of Christ and it comes back again and again and we renounce it in the name of Jesus Christ we relinquish it many of you who get my newsletter may have read

several years ago when my daughter was expecting number 5 that I was upset about that not because I don't like big families as I told you I came from a family of 6 I just felt so sorry for my daughter having number 5 so soon after number 4 and she had all she could handle she was homeschooling 2 children, she had 2 preschoolers and here she was pregnant with number 5 and I was very upset and I wrote about this in my newsletter just telling how I had to get down on my knees and acknowledge first of all that it was absolutely none of my business you know I wanted to tell my son-in-law I wanted to sleep in the backyard for a while I confess, I mean this is absurd this is stupid I don't think I did say that to him but I was churning inside when my son-in-law and my daughter came into my

bedroom I was staying in their guest room and they came in about 5 o'clock in the morning with this announcement I was not thrilled I got down on my knees and I just said Lord I know how wrong my attitude is about this thing you are the offer of life, this is my daughter, this is my child she belongs to you, not me and so you know my feelings Lord pity, upset, turmoil I can't handle these feelings I give them to you Lord now any feelings you can't handle I recommend this simple little gesture just sit down on your knees, open your hands and say Lord I renounce this in the name of Jesus and by your grace I will not retrieve it it's amazing what that can do I shared this with a lady who was having almost pathological problems with jealousy over her husband talking to another woman she said

anytime I see my husband in a conversation with some other woman I can't stand it I just go bananas and I have no reason to think that he's ever been unfaithful or ever wants to be he said I know it's just stupid what can I do, so I just told her this little thing he said I can't tell you what a difference it's made in my life acceptance of what God allows relinquishment first, acceptance next no to myself, yes to God this same author goes on to say it is not making our flesh unfeeling that we hallow God's name on earth now when I've spoken about bringing your emotions under control and written about it in my book This One somebody says to me I don't understand how you got rid of your emotions so why did I ever say anything about getting rid of them when you train a child you're not

getting rid of the child you're bringing the child under authority when you train a racehorse you're not getting rid of the horse, you're bringing the racehorse under the authority of those reins and so I am bringing my emotions under the authority of Jesus Christ my emotions were out of whack over Valerie's number 5 that was not her problem, that was my problem with God it is not in making our flesh unfeeling that we hallow God's name on earth and how do we hallow God's name on earth, we pray all the time hallowed be thy name and I have to be willing to cooperate with the hallowing of his name in other words the making of his name holy is it evident in my life, is it evident in your life that you are a lemon who makes God's name appear holy God's name is holy of course we can't do

anything to change the fact that his name is holy but we can certainly do a great deal to change people's perception of his holiness by the way he did it is not in making our flesh unfeeling so I come to God with all these seething feelings my weaknesses, my sins my foolish, my irritating habits that drive my husband up the wall and there are some and I pray and I think the Lord has made some progress with me because I

don't want to be irritating to him but this is what I come to God with, this is what I am this is the baggage that I come with it's not that I can get rid of it by myself Christian had to come to the foot of the cross and it was at the foot of the cross that the burden rolled off I get letters asking for advice about all kinds of problems that I know absolutely nothing

about you know my answer is simple and I get accused of being simplistic because the answer is simple take it to the foot of the cross I can't tell you what you should do in this or that situation but I can tell you where you can find out bring it to the foot of the cross look at it in the light of God's face it will look different to you if you have a quarrel with something that the Bible says and says well that's impossible in my situation, I can't do that I can't submit to this husband, I can't stay home and take care of my children, I have to work there are a whole lot of things that the Bible doesn't cover I don't know anything, I don't know what to say to a woman in either of those situations I only know that the Bible tells me what I can submit to my husband and the Bible tells me

as an older woman to teach the younger women to stay home and so I do my best to stick to what the Bible does say but this is what comes when you or I come to the foot of the cross we come not by making our flesh unfeeling but in offering it to God burning with the flame of life out of my bondage, sorrow, and night Jesus I come into thy freedom, gladness, and light Jesus I come, out of my sickness into thy health, out of my want and into thy wealth, out of my sin and into thyself, Jesus I come I offer it to God burning with the flame of life everything can be put into the fire that Christ came to kindle the Bible says he came to bring fire on the earth well I'm sure that means a great deal more than what this writer tells me but this writer certainly opened up a new crack in the door so

that I could understand a little bit more everything can be put into the fire that Christ came to kindle whether it be the bitter wood of sorrow the bitter wood of sorrow or the substance of joy it will burn upwards with the same splendor of light in Hebrews 12 we read that we are to make our lives a living sacrifice holy acceptable unto God what can make my life holy?

I am not holy in myself how can I bring my body as a living sacrifice holy acceptable to God? It is the sacrifice that sanctifies it. It is the laying of my life on God's altar on that fire that he came to kindle on earth that becomes holy by being offered as in the Old Testament times the vessels in the tabernacle some were made of gold, some were made of bronze and some of silver.

It was the same gold, the same bronze and the same silver that made other objects in the world but the ones in the temple, the tabernacle were called holy by not because they were made of different material but because they were offered to God. My work in my kitchen is holy when it's offered to God my work at my desk is holy because it's offered to God my work at the ironing board is holy work you mothers of little babies, it's holy work when you breastfeed that baby, it's holy work when you change those diapers.

My little granddaughter Elizabeth who's now the oldest of the girls was probably 7 or 8 her mother asked her to give a bottle to whoever the baby was and I've forgotten and I know that baby hadn't had very many bottles, they were all breastfed but this was an occasion when Valerie said would you please give this bottle to the baby and Elizabeth just rolled her eyes and she looked at me and she said oh granny I think I've given him about a million bottles and I said now if that was the baby Jesus might you look at it differently?

No, I guess so It's the offering to Jesus of your life of your work, of everything that you have everything that you do, everything that you are and everything that you suffer, put it on the altar let the flames carry it

heavenward be a living sacrament holy, acceptable unto God Now I've run along another beautiful letter very different, from a farmer who said I don't always get to listen to your program but your words have comforted and challenged me who is a sinful creature but longs to be obedient to God I purchased Stepping Heavenward which is an old book written 100 years ago by Elizabeth Prentice a few months ago and it has been especially helpful over the last two months My wife and I were expecting the birth of our first child and the due date was my birthday November 15th David Levi is the last name was born July 27th The due date was November but David was born in July He lived about a half an hour and then went to be with our creator My wife Arletha and I were teaching 1st and 2nd grade in Sunday school The memory work for the summer was Mark 10, 13-16 Let the children come to me, do not hinder them for to such belongs a woman of God Has new and deeper meaning for us now Two days before David was born I went down to eat breakfast in the hospital I took Stepping Heavenward with me Arletha and I have been and still are reading it aloud together and opened it to this journal entry There is so much I could say This book, Stepping Heavenward is the diary of a girl beginning with age 16 taking her through engagement, marriage motherhood, death, all sorts of things in her life and so he is quoting from her book and really with so much to make me happy what would become of me if I had no trials suffering, endurance, character, hope which does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Now that letter was written September 12, 1993 He has stapled together three more pages This one, January 1994 Why have I not written for such a long time?

Most of my energy has gone into supporting Arletha and my work I had hoped we would be farther along in the grieving process by now but there are times when it is still quite hard It's someone, and then he stops Next page, April 11.

It is now April 11 I am again attempting to complete my letter to you as I started in January but did not get very far. Since January Arletha has been doing much better We have gone through a lot of suffering since July but there has been a lot of growing as well. I still listen to your program when I can.

I can still hear and again he stops. January 21, 1995 I look back at my attempts to complete a letter to you at ministry and think, don't give up I do feel as if I have withheld a gift from you by not letting you know how your ministry has helped in my walk My wife and I are expecting our second child in April That's next month which means she is 28 weeks along Without going into details, my prayer request is for a healthy baby but more so that we can be at peace and trust God completely every day We have also appreciated reading Oswald Chambers' letters for his highest. Sometimes we don't get the point but usually insightful and challenging There are some tough things in there I have much more trouble with the things I can understand than with the things I can't understand Same with the Bible Then he says, is it possible that God knew in his wisdom that I should give my first child to him in order to create a real desire for children and to realize what a blessing they are Two years ago, I was not very excited about having children.

Not because I didn't like them but because I knew the conflict for me that would come about in the demand for my time We must be allowed to breathe, but also we need to allow others to be a part of the breathing process Thank you for allowing God to use you and for remaining faithful I pray for your ministry I just thought of how a child's preciousness was taught to this father through his death and the parents accepted that child's death We can try all kinds of ways of getting over grief and the world has all sorts of psychological steps to go through.

There's a grieving process that I'm told you're supposed to go through. It takes five steps and it involves things like anger and bargaining, which I don't think a Christian needs to go through Maybe you'll get

through it that way but I know that when I knew that my husband Jim was missing, God brought to my mind the words from Isaiah 43 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned Neither shall the flame come upon thee, for I am the Lord thy God He wants to teach us that he loves us and you who are training your little children by spanking them you have to take that little child in your arms and you have to spank him and say, honey I want you to learn that I did this because I love you Now he's not going to believe that Did you believe that when your parents said this hurts me worse than it hurts you?

Of course not But the time comes when you become a parent and you know it's the absolute truth And the Bible says that the father who does not discipline his son hates him The world puts it the other way around, doesn't it? If you spank your child, you hate your child, that's abuse Well, nothing could be further from the truth Abuse and spanking are two very, very different things God has to, in effect thank us sometimes C.S. Lewis says, he whispers to us in our joys Very often we're not listening to God when everything's going fine, and he whispers to us in our joys we don't hear him He speaks to us in our conscience and he shouts to us in our pain It's when we're in the bottom of the barrel when everything seems to have fallen to pieces that God finally gets our pain He says, if you suffer with me you will also reign with me The cross of Jesus means suffering Jesus keeps me near the cross There, a precious fountain free to all, the healing stream flows from Calvary's mountain In the cross be my glory ever till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river Can you sing those hymns about the cross honestly?

That stanza that I was trying to think about when I first talked It says, O safe and happy shelter O refuge tried and sweet O tricing place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet As to the holy patriarch speaking of David A wondrous dream was given, so seems my Savior's cross to me a ladder up to heaven The cross is a safe and happy shelter Not to be feared, not to be shrunk from not to be avoided A safe and happy shelter, a refuge tried and sweet And this lady, whose letter I read earlier She was at the end of her rope There was no solution whatsoever except to come to that tricing place and find the shelter of the cross by saying, yes Lord, I'm going to do what you say Acceptance Relinquishment of all the bitterness Acceptance of life which comes out of death Paul said, death worketh in us and life in you And if you are going to cooperate in Jesus the death that worketh in the world you are going to have to be broken bread and poured out wine Life is going to work in somebody else because death went to work in you And as one chapel speaker said when I was a college student and I never forgot it, if your life is broken in giving to Jesus, it may be because pieces will feed a multitude when a loaf can satisfy only a little boy The meaning of the cross Relinquishment and acceptance Know to myself, yes to God God bless you

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