

The Message of the Way Of The Cross

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fellowship with God as the foundation for healthy relationships with others, particularly in marriages. It highlights the need to take the first step in restoring broken fellowship, drawing parallels between God's initiative in restoring fellowship with us and the need for humility and spiritual maturity in resolving conflicts. The speaker delves into the significance of the way of the cross in deepening spiritual growth, self-judgment, and continuous transformation into Christlikeness for individuals, families, and church communities.

Scripture: 1 John 3:2, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Peter 4:17, John 13:34, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Luke 9:23, Genesis 3:24, Matthew 16:24, 1 John 3:3

Topics: "Fellowship with God", "Restoration in Relationships"

Description

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Transcript

So we were saying that in our fellowship we must begin with the vertical, which is fellowship with God, and then horizontal. So if we ask ourselves this question, when fellowship is broken between us and another person, say between a husband and a wife, something has happened that can happen in this world, you know, sometimes it's only a misunderstanding, nothing serious, some little misunderstanding that the devil created. And the question is, who is to take the first step to restore that fellowship? I don't know whether you husbands and wives have encountered that problem.

If you've been married more than two days, I'm sure you've encountered that problem. Who is going to take the first step? And I say the answer is, you look at God. When God and us had a broken fellowship, who took the first step? It was God.

Why? Because he was more spiritual. So when a husband and wife have a tension, who should take the first step? The one who is more spiritual. But since both think they are more spiritual, they should be just running into each other's arms.

Is there anybody who thinks you are less spiritual than your partner? It's very difficult to find someone, particularly when there is a misunderstanding, each person thinks I am more spiritual, then you should be the first one to take the step. That's following the Lord. The other thing we can learn in our relationship with one another is, how did God restore his fellowship with us? There had to be a cross on which he died.

Without that, our fellowship would never have been restored. I see that as a principle that when Jesus wanted to have fellowship with me, he said, I have to die on the cross and then that fellowship can be restored. Because fellowship was broken in the Garden of Eden.

If you turn back there, I want to show you something. You know there was a tree of knowledge, a good and evil tree of life. What do you think that tree of life symbolized? The interpretation of the tree of life, what did the tree of life symbolize, is given to us in 2 Corinthians 11.

There are a lot of things in the Old Testament which have a spiritual meaning. And the meaning is found somewhere in the New Testament. For example, I'll give you this example first.

God said, let there be light. It's way back in Genesis 1. That's explained in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 6. That's a picture of Christ coming into our lives. God says to our dark hearts, let there be light.

Christ comes into our life in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 6. It says that God who said, let the light shine out of darkness, has put the light of the knowledge of the glorious God in the face of Christ in our hearts. So that's just one example. So in the same way, 2 Corinthians 11, verse 3, it says here, God says, I am afraid like the serpent to see Eve by his craftiness.

Your minds should be led astray. What was Eve led astray from? Astray from the tree of life to somewhere else. Your mind can be led astray from, what is the tree of life? Simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ.

That is the tree of life. The relationship with Jesus, of love. When that is, when the devil leads us astray from that to anything else, you know you've gone astray.

That's what the devil led Eve astray from. He said, I'm afraid that the devil will lead you astray, just like he led you astray, into knowledge. It's a great temptation for us to acquire knowledge.

And God, Adam and Eve went into the garden. They didn't go for life, they went for knowledge. And I have known through all these years, you know whenever we have a question answer time, I've had that, by the way there are about 600 questions and answers in our CFC website.

A lot of your questions you'll find an answer to there. If you look for it. And I've found in many question answer sessions I've had in many, many countries, many, many churches.

By looking at the questions I know, is this related to life or knowledge? And in most cases, it is knowledge. What does this verse mean? What does that verse mean? What is this other thing? It's not related to, how can I overcome this bad habit? How can I have more spiritual life? See, man's tendency is to look for knowledge. When you go to the Bible to get knowledge, it doesn't help us.

It brings death. Always it brings death. Adam went after knowledge and he got death.

So be careful. Go after life, which is simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. So, when we think of the tree of life, when Adam and Eve went into the garden of Eden, as we read in Genesis chapter 2, the way to the tree of life was completely open.

They could have gone to that easily. But once they sinned and partook of the wrong fruit, immediately the way to the tree of life was not open anymore. We read in Genesis chapter 3 that, in verse 24, 3-24, he drove the man out of the garden of Eden and he stationed him terribly with a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

So what Adam could have gone to without any problem, now he could go only if he went past that sword. And that sword in scripture always symbolizes death. The sword is always a picture of death.

What we today call pain, something like that. So, there was an instrument of death put in front of the tree of life in sinning. There's no way to get to this tree of life except through this.

And what that means for us today is that that sword, first of all, fell upon Jesus Christ on the cross. Therefore, the way to the tree of life is open. But also for us, that sword has to fall on us, that we take the same way of the cross that Jesus chose.

We choose the way of the cross and we enter into life. So in Christ's relationship with me, in order for him to have fellowship with me, there was a cross on which he died. And for me to fellowship with him, there has to be a cross on which I die to my own will.

When Jesus lived on this earth, in his relationship with the Father, Jesus had perfect fellowship with the Father. That is our example. How did he live in perfect fellowship with the Father for 33 1/2 years without breaking that fellowship even for a single moment? There was a cross in Jesus' life where he died inwardly for 33 1/2 years every single day.

And you read that in John 6, verse 38. Our subject is fellowship. How did Jesus have fellowship with the Father? That is the example for us.

John 6, verse 38, Jesus says, I've come down from heaven. Here's the cross, not to do my own will. That's the cross.

The cross is death to my own will so that I can do the will of my Father. So he says, I came from heaven only to do that, not to do my own will. So I call this one sentence, the one-sentence autobiography of Jesus.

Autobiography means when a man writes about his own life. When Jesus is writing about his own 33 1/2 years on earth, in one sentence he says, what did I do in 33 1/2 years on earth? I never did my own will. I did the will of my Father.

Dying on the cross is only one part of it. One part of not doing his own will. You know, in Gethsemane he said, I don't want to go to the cross because it would break my fellowship with you, Father, but not my own will.

That is the most difficult cross he ever bore, break a fellowship with the Father. But throughout his life, he did say no to his own will. That was the only way to keep fellowship with the Father.

If he ever did his own will, fellowship with the Father would have been broken because God created man to do his will. In Revelation chapter 4, it's a song we sing, but I don't know sometimes whether we understand the meaning of it. Revelation chapter 4, you know, Thou Art Worthy, well-known song.

It says here, Revelation 4, verse 11, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, and for you created all things. And in the King James Version, it's like this, and for your pleasure they were created. So we were created in order to please God.

That's how I understand it. I was created, Adam was created to please God, and all human beings from Adam on was right up to Jesus Christ. Nobody pleased God until Jesus came.

And at the end of 30 years, when he was baptized, the Father said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. That's what man was created for, to please the Father. And there was one man who finally did it, Jesus.

And if he was not like us, there's no virtue in it. But he was like us, tempted to do his own will every day. You know, when we talk about sin, all sin is essentially doing your own will.

What did Eve do in the Garden of Eden? She did her own will. God's will is don't eat of that tree, but my will is I want to eat it. I want to do it.

Adam did the same thing. He knew that he was not supposed to eat of that tree, but he ate of it. So all sin is that.

When you get angry or when you lust after God, when you do some unrighteousness with money matters, or any sin, name it, it's always my will. I want to do it. I know what God tells me in my conscience, but I'm not going to listen to that.

That is sin. And so Jesus never sinned, means he never did his own will. That's how his fellowship with the Father is perfect.

So in my fellowship with Jesus too, he has taught us to pray, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, that is in my life, exactly as it is done in heaven.

In heaven the angels never do their own will. They always do the will of the Father. And I'm praying the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray every day.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in my life, exactly as it is done in heaven.

What does that mean? It means that I must give up my own will, and that's the meaning of the cross. And I find that there's very little preaching about taking up the cross every day. If you don't believe it, go to YouTube.

It's got thousands of sermons. And type in taking up the cross and see how many sermons you find. And if you do find a sermon like that, listen to it and see if they explain what taking up the cross means.

Very often the subject will be that, but they never explain what it means. It shows how the most important thing in the Christian life is almost not taught in Christianity today. And that's the reason for the shallowness.

See, it's like a whole lot of children who are not given proper education in a school, and they're always failing in the examinations because the teacher never taught them the most important subjects. And when the examination results come, they're all failing. So this is the most important thing, and I'll tell you why it is

the most important thing.

Because Jesus said, you cannot follow me. If you don't take up the cross every day. Turn with me to Luke chapter 9 and verse 23.

Our subject, remember, is fellowship. How did Jesus have fellowship with the Father? By denying His own will and doing the will of the Father every day. How can we have fellowship with Jesus? Exactly the same way, by denying our own will and doing the will of God every day.

Luke chapter 9 and verse 23. It says, if anyone wishes to come after me, let's go slowly. If anyone, that applies to every single person, do you want to come after Jesus? Not just go to heaven.

He's not saying if anyone wants to go to heaven. I tell you honestly, I'm not interested in going to heaven. I'm not interested in gathering into my church in India people who want to go to heaven.

Not at all. Because the world is full of people who want to go to heaven. I want to find out how many of you want to follow Jesus on earth before going to heaven.

That's a very small number because the weight of life is very narrow. And Jesus said, very few find it. And I said, Lord, those are the ones I want to find.

I don't want a big crowd of people who want to go to heaven. I want to have a small group of people who want to do God's will on earth before they go and accomplish God's purposes, who can say at the end of their life, I finished the work God gave me to do. And so if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself.

He must say no to himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. Which means what? Just think about it. That means Jesus took up his cross every day.

Otherwise, how can I follow him if he tells me to take up my cross every day and he didn't do it himself every day? It's very clear. Follow me because I took up my cross every day. That is the completion of that sentence.

So that is the only way I can follow Jesus Christ. So if there is a day in my life when I don't take up the cross, I'm not following Christ that day. I'm doing whatever I like.

I may say I accepted Christ 20 years ago or something like that, but I'm not following Christ that day. There's not a single day I can follow the Lord if I don't deny myself and take up the cross. And then, of course, people can say, well, boy, this must be a life of tremendous strain and tension, absolute rubbish.

It's the most relaxed life you can ever live. Think of Jesus. Do you think Jesus' life was full of tension and strain? Not at all.

His life was completely one of rest. In fact, he said, learn from me. Come to me.

I'll give you rest. Learn from me for I'm humble and gentle in heart and you'll find rest for your souls. Rest means a complete absence of tension and strain.

The most wonderful life that anyone ever lived on earth was the life Jesus lived. And if you believe that is the most wonderful life that anybody can live, I want to live like that. I must find out what is the secret of

that life.

I'm convinced that the most wonderful life anybody could live is the one that Jesus lived. He never made a lot of money. He wasn't world famous.

He never traveled to many countries. A lot of things that people think are very important. He never had a vacation.

But he lived the most wonderful life that anybody on earth ever lived. And he didn't live very long either. In 33 and a half years, he finished the Father's will.

And so if I believe that, I must say, Lord, what was the secret of your life? I want to live like that. And the secret of his life was he never did his own will. And it was not a life of tension.

It was a relaxed, restful life. The devil says there will be tension all the time, finding out what is the Father's will, what is the Father's will. It's not like that.

The Holy Spirit comes within and it's a life of deep, inward rest where there's complete freedom from tension. Tension is for those people who are trying to do their own will and plan their own life on earth. They live with constant tension and fear and uncertainty about the future and anxiety.

I don't believe there was anxiety in Jesus' mind concerning the future at any time. At no time was he anxious about the future. And I said, Lord, I want that life where I'm never anxious about the future, not about my health or whether I'm going to die or sick or nothing.

Or whether I have enough money to take care of my needs. And when your children are small, Lord, will I be able to take care of these children? What all fears and tensions and worries even believers have. You're not supposed to live like that.

Not at all. I don't believe you're supposed to live like that. I believe you're supposed to live a life completely free from anxiety.

And I'm not talking about some imaginary life. This is exactly how God wants every Christian to live. And you can live that life if you decide, I don't want to do my will anymore on this life.

I want to do the will of God in every area. Whatever he wants me to do. That is how Jesus lived in fellowship with the Father.

And that's the way we can live in fellowship with Christ and the Father every single day of our life. And I said that that vertical fellowship is what leads to the horizontal fellowship. So when Jesus said, take up the cross and follow me, I see that in his relationship with me there was a cross on which he died.

And so in my fellowship with another brother or my wife, there's a cross on which I have to die. If I don't die, I can't have fellowship. And it's like this.

I use this example sometimes. Where there's, you know, two strong people are always clashing, clashing, clashing, clashing. A lot of noise is coming in.

One of them stops, dies. The clash is over. There's no sound anymore.

I heard a story once, well maybe it's a parable, of a man who had a next door neighbor who knew that man and his wife. Every morning at 6.30 they'd start fighting. You could hear it in the next house.

It's almost like an alarm clock, 6.30 they'd be fighting. And every day, one day, for silence, he says, what happened? That they made peace with each other? And he went and discovered that one of them died. That brought peace.

It's a parable. So when a husband and wife have a clash, if one of them is willing to die, to self, you can have peace every day. So instead of clashing, one person says, no, I'm going to die.

No clash. And if both are willing to die, it leads to fellowship. So this is the ideal married life, where both husband and wife have been gripped by a calling to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

To die to self, to take up the cross, every day. I tell you, your home will be like heaven on earth, and that is the best atmosphere in which to bring up your children. The greatest inheritance that you can give your children is not the thousands of dollars you save up for them.

Not the wonderful education you can give them. But an atmosphere at home, which is like heaven on earth. That when they grow up and get married, they say, I want a home like that.

Thereby, the light shines onto the next generation. This is the way God wants every single family to live. And the same principle applies in a church.

See, however much we may say we love one another, it is really impossible to love one another in a church if I'm not willing to take up the cross. Jesus said in John chapter 13, let me show that to you in Scripture. John 13, he said, he first said, it's a very important verse, John 13, 34 and 35.

He said in verse 35, all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another. That's what we've been thinking of. A family, which is like a family, a beautiful family of God, where everybody loves one another.

Not with this human type of love, where we say nice words and help one another practically. No. The type of love he was speaking about is described in verse 34.

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another the way I loved you. That is by dying on a cross. That's how I love you.

Because from that moment, he was going to the cross the next morning. The way I love you, that's the way you must love one another. And he says, when you love one another like that, between you and the other person, there's a cross on which you die.

Then people will know you are my disciples. So that's our calling, and I believe that's the most important thing that we need to recognize in our relationship. In relationship to everybody that I have a relationship with, Lord, there's got to be a cross between me and that person on which I die.

I don't demand that he dies. He has to choose himself. The cross is never something the Lord forces upon us.

You know, the Roman soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross, but the Lord never forced anybody to take up the cross. There's always an if. If any man wants to come up to me.

So what if in your relationship with your wife, she doesn't want to take up the cross? It doesn't make the slightest difference. You decide to take up the cross. What if your husband doesn't want to take up the cross? It doesn't make any difference.

You decide, I'm going to take up the cross because I'm not going to force the cross on anybody. I'll be like the Roman soldiers then, when you're trying to force somebody. See, for example, if a husband quotes this verse to his wife.

Hey, the Bible says, you wife, be subject to your own husband. What's he doing? He's forcing his wife to do something. God never does that.

I always say when you come across a verse that says, wives, be subject to your own husbands, that letter was not written for you. Don't open other people's letters. That's for your wife to read and obey herself.

You're reading somebody else's letter when you say, wives, obey your husbands. When you come to that verse, just skip it and go to the next verse. It says, husbands, love your wives.

Do you ever read anybody else's letters? I hope not. There are a lot of letters in the scripture which are not written for you. Is it written for your wife? Leave it to her.

She can read it. She's not illiterate. And likewise, when it says, husbands, love your wives, leave that to the husband to read.

We're not here to force other people. Because I tell you this, there are so many husbands who tell their wives, you've got to be subject to me. The Bible says that.

Where did you read that? You read that in somebody else's letter. That's not meant for you. Or the wife, if she's smart, she'd say, but you've got to love me as Christ loved the church.

See, this is the type of argument that goes on. All this will disappear when you die. It's a wonderful thing to learn the way of the cross.

So many situations, I find the answer is this. Somebody tries to say something that hurts you. You cannot be hurt if you have died to yourself.

That's what I say to myself. Did that guy say something that hurt me? That means I'm not dead yet. Dead men don't get hurt.

Did you know that? So I say, Lord, this is just a demonstration to me. I haven't died yet. I want to die.

And God gives us so many opportunities for this. And for me, it has been a tremendous revelation. And I'll tell you how I got this revelation.

Way back when I was a young Christian and I wanted to serve the Lord, I said, Lord, I want to be, I want to baptize in the Holy Spirit. I see that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit when the river Jordan went out with such power to serve God. And I said, Lord, I want that.

Because when you call me to serve you, I must be anointed. And I went to this meeting and that meeting. I went to this Pentecostal church and that Pentecostal church.

And I was very disappointed. Very disappointed. And all I heard was a lot of noise and shouting and screaming and babbling around.

And I said, Lord, that's not what I want. I want power. And so the Lord allowed me to be frustrated with all that I saw in almost every Christian group.

And I came back to the scriptures. And I saw that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit when he allowed John the Baptist to put him under the water and baptize him, immerse him, and then raise him up. That's when the Spirit came upon him.

And I got a revelation in that moment as to what that baptism was. See, John the Baptist was preaching the baptism of repentance. People were standing in line saying, I have repented of my sins.

And the Pharisees came along and said, go. You go away. You haven't repented.

It's only people who repented who came in that line. And Jesus, who had never sinned, stood in that line. What was he coming for? He wasn't coming to repent of any sin because he never did any sin in his 30 years.

He came to testify to one thing. And that is, in every situation in life, every day of my life, if somebody puts me down to death into the waters, I will accept it. I will let people kill me because I know the Father will raise me up.

That was his testimony in baptism. I'm willing to choose death to my own will so that I can do the will of God. That was his testimony in baptism.

And so I saw something there, that Jesus was choosing the way of the cross in that testimony in baptism. I choose to die because I know the Father will raise me up. And it's a choice.

You know, when somebody is baptizing you in water, you can resist it if you want. So it's a very real picture. Are you willing to let someone put you down to death? And I saw there, and this is what the Lord spoke to me, that it's when Jesus chose the way of the cross, symbolically, in that baptism that the Holy Spirit came upon me.

And I remember so clearly, the Lord said to me at that time, If you choose the way of the cross, my power will rest upon you all your life. And the day you choose to move away from the way of the cross, my power will depart from you. The Lord said that to me in 1963.

How many years ago was that? 55 years ago. I've never forgotten it. That's the time when I began to be gripped by the way of the cross.

And it was by revelation from heaven that I understood that. It's in the scriptures, but I hardly found anybody talking about it. And from that time onwards, I began, I mean, it took time, there was a lot of backsliding and all that in between.

But more and more, as I began to be gripped by the way of the cross, I found a connection between the spiritual life and the way of the cross. Both go together. And I believe, I have a lot of respect for the Pentecostal church that has preached the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But I disagree with them completely in many, many things when they say it, speaking in tongues as the evidence. And I believe one of the biggest lacks in that, the biggest lacks in other churches is they don't preach the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But I believe the biggest lack in churches that do preach the fullness of the Spirit is they have not taught the importance of the way of the cross.

That one thing is missing. The Holy Spirit leads us along the way of the cross. Because that's how our capacity increases.

That's how fellowship becomes better and better and better. Even our fellowship with each other is not meant to be at the same level. It's meant to grow, you know, like a fellowship between a husband and wife must grow.

Fellowship between a brother and brother must grow. And that's only possible if we are filled with the Holy Spirit and choose the way of the cross. And I discovered that the way of the cross is something, if I choose every day, my capacity, inward spiritual capacity grows.

So, when I'm first born again, and I ask the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit the day you're born again. You don't have to wait any length of time.

As soon as you're born again, you say, Lord, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit right there. But your capacity is like a cup.

You know, like it says, I lift up my cup, cup of salvation. And I say, Lord, fill me. My cup is full.

But if I choose the way of the cross every day from that day onwards, my capacity will increase. And the cup becomes a bucket. I need to be filled again.

Because capacity is more now. It becomes a cup. I need to be filled again.

It becomes a lake. I need to be filled again. It becomes a river.

I need to be filled again. It becomes many rivers. So, the spiritual life is a life of continuously increased capacity.

And that increased capacity comes only as you choose the way of the cross every day. And if you miss some days, you miss the opportunity to increase your capacity. So, it's not just a static thing.

If I was filled with the Spirit 20 years ago, well, you could still be the size of a cup today. And that's not God's will. The Apostle Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit about three days after he was converted on the road to Damascus when Ananias came to meet him.

And he was also filled with the Holy Spirit at the end of his life. But in the beginning, he was like a cup. At the end, he was like many rivers flowing out of his life.

And that's because he chose the way of the cross. So, I want to say this, my brothers and sisters, because I find that many Christians don't teach this sufficiently. And the result is that there's a shallowness in many Christians.

And many people are doing so many other things right. They're wondering, what is missing in my life? It's the way of the cross that's missing. I remember some years ago, the Lord made it clear to me, like, the five

fingers on my hand.

And the Lord showed me there are five things essential for spiritual growth, to have a strong grip on the Christian life. See, like, if I want to hold something with two fingers, I can do that. But somebody can pull it out of my hand easily.

But when I have five fingers grip on it, it's a pretty solid grip. And the five fingers the Lord showed me was, first of all, the blood of Jesus Christ. I have to begin there, because we've all got such tremendous guilt from our past.

We must be absolutely sure that the blood of Christ has cleansed me from all my sins. And not only cleansed me, but declared me righteous in God's eyes. Not only just as if I've never sinned, but declared righteous in God's eyes, accepted in Christ.

Secondly, I need the word of God. If I ignore the word of God, I can't live. Man should live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth.

So that's the second thing I need. And the third is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. You cannot live the Christian life without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

And fourth is the way of the cross. Taking out the cross every day. And the fifth is the fellowship of the body of Christ.

So these are the five things that the Lord showed me. I must have all through my life. I need the blood of Christ every day of my life.

I need the word of God every day. I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day. I need to die to myself every day.

And I need fellowship in the body of Christ if I am to grow spiritually. There's no part of this human body that can operate independently. Each part needs the other.

Even, you know, we may say the heart is the most important part of our body. But what would the heart do without the hand, which picks up the food and puts it in the mouth and so many other organs inside that digest the food. Pumps blood to the heart and keeps the heart healthy.

If the hand didn't do the job, the heart would die. So even if you say the heart is the most important, it's dependent on the hand. There's no part of the body that's not needing another.

That's what the Lord showed me. That I must learn to recognize that I need my brothers and sisters. I've seen people who are very good Christians who live by themselves without fellowship with others.

Very often they're not able to see sins in their own life. They're not able to see particularly pride. Pride is something which we cannot see when we're all by ourselves.

But if you seek to mingle in the body of Christ, you'll get light on your pride and your arrogance. I've seen many people speak to me. There's such an arrogance and pride oozing out from them, but they can't see it themselves.

And the very way they speak, I can make out there's arrogance and pride in them, but they can't see it. And I can tell you why they can't see it. You can almost certainly see it.

They are loners. They live by themselves. They don't have any fellowship with anybody.

So they never get any light on the pride in their life. I know the amount of light I've got in my life. Pride is in everybody.

Selfishness is in everybody. We don't get light on these things until we learn to live in fellowship. So fellowship gives us light on ourselves, and that's how we become a better family as we cleanse ourselves from it.

I think all married people will admit that they never discovered how selfish they were until they got married. It's certainly true of my life. I thought I was very spiritual until I got married.

Then I discovered what a lot of selfishness there was in me. And so it's a good thing to get married because you get light on your selfishness, which you're very ignorant of. You see, because when you're alone, if you find difficult people around you, you can always retreat into your room and be by yourself.

But after you're married, when you retreat into your room, there's another person living there with you you can't retreat from. You have to live with that person. And then you discover self, the areas of selfishness where you think only of yourself and not of the other.

And that's good because you can judge yourself and cleanse yourself. And if a husband and wife determine, I'm going to judge myself and cleanse myself, then fellowship will become more and more closer and better as time goes by. So part of this, taking up the cross, includes judging ourself when we get light on something.

In 1 Peter chapter 4, we read these words. 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 17. It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God, and it must begin with us first.

Where should judgment begin? With the family of God first. And to me, that is an indication of who belongs to the family of God. According to this verse, it's those people who belong to the family of God who judge themselves first.

You see, in the world, we put ourselves first in every area except judgment. When it comes to judgment, others are first. We judge others.

But every other area, it's me first. When we get converted, we turn right side up, and then we put others first in every area. That's the way a Christian should be, except in judgment.

In judgment, we put ourselves first. Has that happened in your life? I find many Christians, even after many years of being Christians, they're so quick to judge other people, to attribute the worst possible motive. When they see someone doing something, they say it must be because of this bad motive that they're doing it.

They can't think of a good motive there. That shows how much light you need to get on your own selfishness and pride, that you tend to attribute the worst possible motive, why that person did that. I've had to cleanse myself from it because I'm also born in the race of Adam.

And I say, Lord, I don't want to judge that person. Maybe there's a good motive there. I don't know.

But I want to judge myself first. I'm not here to judge other people first. And I've discovered that if I'm faithful in this area, I become more and more useful in the household of God.

Therefore, I say that this is the mark of a person who's truly part of God's family. He judges himself. And what's he judging himself on? He's judging himself in the areas where he's discovering that he's not Christ-like.

And that's what he deepened my fellowship with others. Because if I keep cleansing myself and the other person keeps cleansing himself, gradually we will become a beautiful family of God. This is the way to deeper fellowship and becoming more Christ-like, not just individually, but as a church.

So when we realize that I'm not yet become like Christ, and all of us should acknowledge that, if I'm not become like Christ and I'm eager to become like Christ, then I need to say, Lord, will you show me the areas in my life where I'm not like Christ? And if you're serious about it, God will show you. I find God shows me that, to tell you honestly, every day. Every day.

Something. Some little teeny-weeny little thing. You know, we get past all the major sins like telling lies and getting angry and lusting after women and unrighteousness of money.

We get past all that and we come to the most serious things in the Christian life, those inner little fine little sins which other people don't see. And we begin to judge ourselves with little little attitudes towards other person, to other people, and inner judgments of others and all that. And as we cleanse ourselves, we are becoming more and more like Christ.

And this can only happen if I judge myself in a particular situation. I say, Lord, I want to judge myself here. Why did it happen like this? I want you to cleanse me.

The result is I've become a little more Christ-like. The goal of the Christian life is to become totally like Jesus Christ. We all acknowledge that.

But we should be growing in that direction continuously. Let me show you the testimony of the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians, in Chapter 4, this is what he said.

2 Corinthians 4. It's been a great challenge to me as I've read this. He said in Verse 16, 2 Corinthians 4, 16. Although our outer man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day.

I used to say that Christian growth is like going from one grade to another in a school. The child is in the first grade and goes to second grade, third grade. So every year we should be becoming more Christ-like.

And your marriage partner should be able to testify that you have become more Christ-like in the last one year. And others in your church should be able to say, but here Paul says day by day. And that's what challenged me.

I said, what a life Paul had come to. Where his inner man was becoming more Christ-like every single day. He took his Christian life really seriously.

He wasn't just happy becoming more Christ-like next year compared to this year. He said, I want to be more Christ-like tomorrow than I am today. That is the will of God.

Because it's a long way to total Christ-likeness. And I'm going to work on that every single day of my life. If I see that as my goal.

And in fact, that is the mark of a person who really believes that Christ is coming back. Let me show you that from 1 John, chapter 3. In 1 John, chapter 3. If I were to ask you, how many of you have the hope of Christ coming back? You'd all say yes, I have. But the Bible says that it's not a single hope, it's a dual hope.

Many people think that Christ is coming back. That's one part of it. The second part is, I will be like him when he comes.

See 1 John 3.2. 1 John 3.2, the middle of that verse. We know that when he appears, two things will happen. We will see him and we will be like him.

Now most Christians, I'd say 99% of Christians only think of we will see him. I'll see him in the air. That's only half the hope.

The other half is, I will be like him. Does that excite you as much as I will see him? I want to be just as excited by the fact that I'll be like him. Why? Because I'm sick and tired of not being like him here on this earth.

I'm sick and tired of my selfish life. I'm sick and tired of the pride. I'm sick and tired of the way, un-Christ-like things I see in my life.

That I'm so excited that one day I'll be like him. You'll be excited with that if you are sick and tired of the un-Christ-like things you see in your own life today. I'm sorry to say most people have only half a hope.

I will see him as he is. It's a very selfish way to live. I'll see him as he is.

He'll wipe away all my tears and I'll live in heaven. There'll be no more pain, no more suffering. I want more than that.

I want to be like him. That's why it says here, there's a dual hope. When he appears, I'll be like him.

And I will see him as he is. And if we have this double hope, what is the proof of it? The proof is, verse 3, that every day you will purify yourself. Just as he is pure.

I want to say that I've been gripped by this. And I thank God I've been gripped by it because it's changed my Christian life completely. It's brought my inner life to such tremendous rest.

The opinion of men doesn't bother me one bit now, whether they think good of me or bad of me. And my fellowship with people who are walking the same way becomes deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper. This is the way to build a church as the family of God, where each person in the church has decided to choose the way of the cross and is judging himself every day.

You who are married, try this from today onwards. Say, Lord, I want to go on this way in my family life. I'm not here to judge my partner.

I want to judge myself and see where I am on Christ's life. Give me light. Give me light.

And let me judge myself. Let me accept him. As the light shines in you more and more as you cleanse yourself, that light will convict your partner as well upon Christ's likeness in his life or her life.

It will convict other people in your church of when they see something of Christ in you because you're cleansing yourself. This is how we are to build fellowship with each other. And as the fellowship becomes deeper and deeper and deeper, until one day we become like him completely.

You know, I've found through the years, whenever I preached on the message of taking up the cross, for many people, it's a very heavy message. Because, you say, let's move on to something like praise and thanksgiving or something like that. But I've seen people who spend their life talking about praise and thanksgiving and never grow spiritually.

This is the message that will help you to grow spiritually. And if you find that this message is too heavy for you, go to God and say, Lord, I think I missed the most important thing in the Christian life. I want to be gripped by this.

I want to be gripped by this until it changes my life. That's for you. Heavenly Father, only you can make this clear to us.

Oh, Spirit of God. I can never explain it to anyone. But you can show us the way of the cross so clearly.

The way that Jesus walked all his life, that made his life so full of joy and triumph and victory every day. Make it like that in our lives, Lord. We want reality.

We want really to know what it is to walk in fellowship with you every day. And that's to deepen our fellowship with one another. Hear us, we pray.

Make this clear to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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