

6. EVERYDAY MARTYRDOM



Jesus said, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me' (Luke 9:23). Jesus says we're to take up our cross '*daily*'. The way of the cross is a daily activity. Every day.

WOTC

In recent years bracelets with the mnemonic 'WWJD', standing for 'What Would Jesus Do?', have become popular. Helpful, but not quite helpful enough. The cross is our model. The question we should be asking is: What does it mean to follow the way of the cross? Our bracelets should read 'WDIMTFTWOTC'! Or maybe just 'WOTC'.

What does the practice of the cross mean when someone wrongs me?

'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you' (Ephesians 4:32).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I'm tired and someone asks for help?

'But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you' (Philippians 2:17).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I want to hold back from taking a risk or moving out of my comfort zone?

'Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Ephesians 5:1-2).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I see an opportunity to impress someone with my Bible knowledge or Christian service?

'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves . . . Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2:3, 5-8).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I start asking, 'How will this affect me?'

'Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2:4-5, 8).

What does the practice of the cross mean when my family asks why I've not pursued a career like other people?

'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14).

What does the practice of the cross mean when people don't respond to my hard work on their behalf?

'To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve' (1 Peter 5:1–2).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I open my wallet?

'See that you also excel in this grace of giving . . . For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:7, 9).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I start to say, 'I want my way'?

'Then [Jesus] said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will"' (Matthew 26:38–39).

What does the practice of the cross mean when friends urge me to join them in sinful behaviour?

'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin . . . They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you . . .' (1 Peter 4:1, 4).

What does the practice of the cross mean when you receive threatening phone calls?

'Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you' (1 Peter 4:12-14).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I find other Christians difficult to get on with?

'Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me" . . . Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God' (Romans 15:2-3, 7).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I get a position of authority?

'Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:43-45).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I see other Christians in need?

'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?' (1 John 3:16-17).

What does the practice of the cross mean when the washing-up needs doing at home?

'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25; see also 1 Peter 2:18 - 3:7).

What does the practice of the cross mean when friends sneer at my faith?

'If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:20–23).

What does the practice of the cross mean when I face temptation?

'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God' (1 Peter 4:1–2).

Everyday martyrdom

The point is not to learn the list, but to learn the habit, the reflex, the principle. The five Ss of sacrifice, submission, self-denial, service and suffering can be applied in every situation.

The way of the cross impacts on both our big life-choices and our small daily actions. It really does include both martyrdom and washing-up. Some of us think we might do well in the big things – at least in theory. But we don't do so well in the small things.

I remember a missionary visiting us, someone who'd moved across continents. That's a big choice to make for you and your family. But he never did the small things. He never offered to help with washing-up, never cleared the table. It made me wonder whether he'd crossed continents because he treasured Christ or because he treasured his reputation.