

THE CROSS – A SAMPLER

From *The Theology of the Cross* by Daniel M. Deuschlander

The Cross of the young

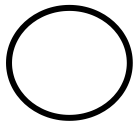
- How can God possibly love me when all I do is lash out at people who are just trying to help me?
- How can God possibly love me when I have fallen into this or that sin and cannot seem to escape it?
- If God really cared about me, why does he let me be plagued with temptations that I just cannot resist?
- If God really cared about me, why does he let me suffer so all alone in the world, with no one who understands me or really cares about me?
- Why should God love me, when I find it so hard even to stand myself?
- What's the point in resisting sins that I know I'm going to commit anyway? Why not just give up instead of tormenting myself with a struggle that I will lose anyway?
- If I don't do what everyone else does, then I won't have any friends. Worse yet, they will discover what I am working so hard to keep a secret: I'm weird! Why does God leave me so alone?
- If I don't join in abusing and picking on so and so, then everyone will think that I am as strange as he or she is. Why does God make helping someone so difficult, so expensive?

The Cross of those in the middle

- Greed or ambition for its own sake begets disappointment, since neither greed nor ambition can ever be fully satisfied. Then comes the temptation either to complain that God blesses other more than he blesses me or to push God still further to the fringes of life in the vain struggle to satisfy insatiable greed and ambition.
- God himself may send frustration and failure and loss in his loving attempt to call us back to himself. Since we have wrong goals, what he sends is a heavy burden. The devil wants to use that burden to drag us still further away from God by arguing that our loss proves that he doesn't love us or really care about us.
- The growing indifference to God or doubt about his grace makes every problem in life more difficult to bear, for we see ourselves as carrying the load alone, without either God's help or God's good intentions, without even the understanding of those who are supposed to love us the most.
- Physical sickness may come also from God's gracious hand as a way of bringing us to a reordering of our priorities. But the devil will try to use it as still further evidence of God's indifference, or alternatively, to drive us to despair with the thought that we are finally getting what we deserve for our idolatrous lifestyle.
- Disappointment in spouse, in children, in fair-weather friends who are just as self-centered as we have been, tempts to withdraw us still further into self and self-service.

The Cross of those in the golden years

- With advancing years, ambition has to be replaced with a certain resignation that the years of gain and upward mobility are over. We can become bitter about the loss and let that callus over our soul.
- The body is losing its ability to bounce back from sickness; sight and hearing are failing; organs that always worked before now hurt more than they work. We can get angry and bore everyone to death with our endless complaints of aches and pains; we can even shake an occasional fist at God for letting us suffer thus.
- We are becoming ever more dependent on those around us for help and care. Our loss of control over our lives and bodies can make us bitter and resentful; it can become an excuse to unleash our anger at those who have taken control away from us.
- The specter of death draws ever closer. Friends and loved ones die every year. Our own frailty together with the death of loved ones makes it harder and harder to pretend that death only happens to other people. The devil grabs us by the throat in the middle of the night to whisper in our ear, "And you too must die!" He... likes nothing better than in these last days of our life to dredge up all our failures, all our sins, and throw them in a heap on our head and in our face. The memory of past sins, of things done to hurt others, of things left undone that could have helped another, these are heavy burdens indeed. They drive us to despair.



GroupWork

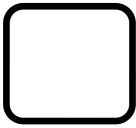
Bible Study Discussion Starters

Life application materials for use in small group Bible study and home devotions, and personal use.

1. One of Wisconsin's greatest traditions, the Friday Fish Fry, has a connection to the practice of giving something up for Lent. Where is your favorite fish fry?
2. Read the message text (Mark 8:31-38) and look at the message outline to remind you of the message.
 - a. What was memorable from the message? Share it with the group.
 - b. What question did the message raise in your mind? Discuss it as a group.

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Rather than just giving up meat or sweets we give ourselves up, and not just for Lent, but our whole lives. In this study we will examine what it means to deny ourselves in two different scenarios: in what we choose to do (Isaiah 58:1-10), and in what happens to us (Romans 5:1-11).

3. Read Isaiah 58:1-5. At first glance, the Israelites look like great people we would want as friends in our church (verse 2). They even "deny themselves" by fasting and humbling themselves. They appear to be people who are taking up their crosses and following God. But when you look at their questions in the first half of verse 3 you can see their true motivation.
 - a. They fasted—but for whose benefit? Who was their "self-denial" really for?
 - b. We all want to think that we live our Christian lives for God and for others. But hiding a self-seeking attitude under self-denial is an easy trap to fall into. What are some tell-tale signs you should watch for in your own life that show you when your Christian life is becoming all about you?
4. Read Isaiah 58:6-10. Compare these verses to Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40. God loves other people so much that when we do good things for others he takes it personally. Is there something your small group could do to show love for others?
5. Isaiah 58 applied more to what we choose to do—how we choose to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus. Now read Romans 5:1-11. Here we see not what we choose, but what happens to us without our choosing.
 - a. When we think about things happening to us, our minds quickly jump to suffering—bad things happening to us. But look at 5:1, 5:5, 5:6, 5:8 and 5:10. Pick one of them and use it to describe the best things that have happened to us—our salvation!
 - b. Denying ourselves and taking up our cross when difficult things happen to us is all about our attitude toward suffering. We are not victims filled with bitterness! Use verses 3-5 to describe what fills our hearts even when suffering comes!



NoteSheet

Sermon Outline

Take notes during the sermon to help you remember the main points.

RETHINKING RELIGION: WHAT WE GIVE UP FOR LENT

Mark 8:31-38

“If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Evangelical Heritage Version).

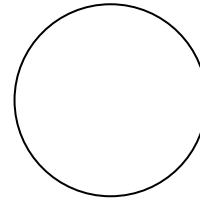
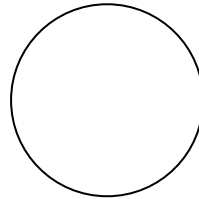
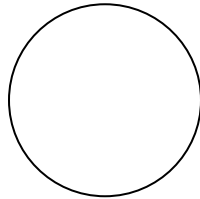
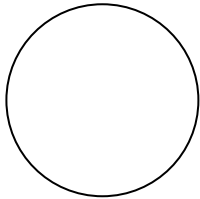
1. The history of your cross

Before the Fall

After the Fall

After Conversion

In Heaven



2. The shape of your cross

- a. Laziness, complacency – A refusal to submit my will to _____
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matthew 22:37).
- b. Self-righteousness – A refusal to submit my will to God’s _____
Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
- c. Despair – A refusal to submit my will to God’s _____
Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (Romans 5:1-2).

3. The joy of your cross

Men have abandoned marriage and parenthood (Ryan Burge from Graphs about Religion 2/19/2024).

Leader of Hmong Fellowship Church imprisoned for seven years because he would not reject Christ.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance (James 1:2-3).

4. The strength for your cross

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:29-30).

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).