

The Crucified Life

Jesus said:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24, NIV)

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified. Standing at a safe distance, I can understand what He was telling them. But what is He saying *to me*? And what is the Apostle Paul telling me when he says:

Count yourselves dead to sin. (Romans 6:11, NIV)

Or what about this?

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. (Galatians 2:20, NIV)

I'm comfortable with the concepts as long as they're aimed at somebody else. They make sense. But if my personal interests are being crucified, I get very uncertain. I can stand back and admire the beauty of these truths until I actually have to deny myself. When I have to lay aside my ego and my rights in a relationship and act only in the other person's best interests, then suddenly unselfishness doesn't seem so sensible.

Sometimes I see Jesus' footsteps leading me to the Calvary, just when pursuing "the good life" seems so natural.

I feel the weight of the cross when I realize that I'm here to serve God, not my comfort and career.

I feel the nails in my hands when I ask what He wants me to do with *His* money and *His* time in this world of suffering and need.

I feel the spear pierce my side when I realize that my whole life—all my energies and every dream—are to glorify Him, not me.

When I honestly address these deep demands of discipleship, I choke. How can I even begin to measure up? Is this one of those guilt trips I have to either avoid or rationalize away?

But then I face my Savior, who is here with me now, and I realize it is His voice I hear and His heart that is speaking to me. I am reminded that like all His commands, these words are gifts of love. They are invitations to remove everything that separates Him and me, to enjoy a deeper fellowship with Him and a more complete rest in Him. And with Jesus speaking the words, I start to hear them differently.

Yes, I have to count myself dead to sin. But then I am *alive to God in Christ Jesus*, and *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:11, 23, NIV).

When I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, ***Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*** (Galatians 2:20, NIV).

As I trust Him, *Christ lives in me!* I rejoice in His presence and eagerly listen for His voice. I start to taste His freedom from selfishness and begin bringing all my needs to Him.

As I turn my life-style over to Him, my love for Him grows warmer and more personal. I begin to release my fears and embrace Him with my whole heart.

As I embrace Him, I find He takes away, not my freedom, but my slavery to myself. He doesn't take my dignity, but only my empty pride. He doesn't lessen the excitement of life. He helps me enjoy more and more of the full life that He wants for me.

Jesus Christ offers each of us freedom and wholeness, if only we will lay down our lives daily and let Him live through us.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV)

Listen...and sing if you want:

Hymn: *Hear His Call*

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