

CROSS TRAINING

A photograph of a person's legs and feet in athletic wear, walking on a grassy path. The person is wearing black shorts and pink sneakers. The background is a blurred natural setting with green grass and trees under a blue sky. The text 'CROSS TRAINING' is overlaid in large, white, distressed font at the top. A diagonal watermark 'Creative Communications Sample' is visible across the center.

A Bible Study on Cross Bearing

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If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself
and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23

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INTRODUCTION

Athletes involved in cross-training practice a variety of skills that exercise different muscle groups. Sometimes they jog long distances and at other times run sprints. They lift weights. The varied training enables them to be at their best for competition.

As followers of Jesus, we are involved in a different kind of cross-training. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). In this Bible study we will look at five characteristics (among many!) that we display in our lives as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. In each cross-training session we will look to Holy Scripture to consider various questions in our training: How did Jesus display this trait or quality? What is the opposite of this trait? What do we deny within ourselves to display this quality? How might this quality bring trial or suffering? Is this trait a "burden" in some way? What does this quality look like "in action," in real life?

Jesus took up his cross for the sake of our salvation. For us he suffered the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins. For us he rose up from death on the third day. Now we take up our crosses and follow in the steps of our crucified and risen Lord!

SESSION 1

CROSS-TRAINING

They seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. Luke 23:26



OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the gift of your Son, our Lord, who denied himself and took up his cross for our sake. Bless our study of your Word and help us by your Spirit to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow daily in our Savior's steps. Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What pictures or portrayals of Jesus' crucifixion have you found especially moving?

INTRODUCTION

On the day we now call Good Friday, a man named Simon of Cyrene quite literally picked up a cross and followed Jesus. Pressed into service by the soldiers, Simon dragged the heavy wooden instrument of torture as he walked the path to the site of Savior's execution. As Simon followed the accused and condemned "King of the Jews," did he recognize the King of kings? We don't know what Simon was thinking that day, but we know and love our King, the King who laid down his life for us. Like that first cross-bearing follower, we too take up our crosses and follow our King.

COME AFTER ME

"So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull" (John 19:16-17). Condemned to death by crucifixion, Jesus was led out of the city to the execution site. Like other condemned victims, he carried the instrument of his own death—the whole cross or, more likely, the heavy crossbeam to which his hands would be nailed before the beam was hoisted up onto the upright post.

1. Jesus, weakened by beating and scourging, apparently could not keep up with the deathly parade. A bystander, Simon of Cyrene, was forced to carry the Savior's cross. **Read Luke 23:26-31 and Mark 15:21.** Simon had to obey the soldiers who "compelled" him. What might he have been thinking and feeling as he took up the victim's cross? Why might he have been afraid to get involved? Why would he be eager to help? Why might he have resented being pressed into service? Jesus speaks to the weeping women, warning them of terror to come. "The wood is green," that is, the Savior lives among them (see Isaiah 11:1 and Isaiah 53:2). In 70 A. D., several decades after the Lord ascends into heaven, terror will come upon them when the Romans destroy Jerusalem. Had you been in Jerusalem on that first Good Friday, would you have watched the condemned as they passed by? Why or why not?

2. Because Simon's sons are mentioned by name, they may have become believers who were known to those who first heard and read Mark's gospel. Perhaps those early Christians could even ask Alexander and Rufus about Simon and his cross-bearing experience. We do not know if Simon already believed in Jesus on this first Good Friday, or if he ever came to faith, but he was the first to take up a cross and follow Jesus. **Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13.** How does Paul describe the apostles' experience of cross bearing? How does his description also fit the events of the first Good Friday? In what ways are we, as followers of Jesus, still regarded today as "a spectacle to the world" and "fool's for Christ's sake"?
3. **Read Luke 9:21-24.** Before he tells his disciples to take up their crosses, what does Jesus predict concerning himself? Before we ever took up our own crosses, the Lord was nailed to the cross for the sake of our salvation. **Read 1 Peter 2:21-25.** How did Jesus react toward those who persecuted him? In what circumstances might we need to follow this example of Jesus? According to these verses, what have we received through Jesus' cross-bearing and crucifixion?

DENY YOURSELF

1. The self-denial of which Jesus speaks is much more than giving up ice cream and cookies if you are on a diet or choosing to give up something for Lent. **Read Luke 9:46-48.** Jesus' disciples, like us, were not necessarily eager to deny themselves. Shortly after learning that they should deny themselves, what do the disciples argue about? What does Jesus say and do to set them straight? Why was a child a helpful example for this lesson in self-denial? **Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5.** What leads the list in this catalog of sinful behaviors? Why might "love of self" lead to so many of the other sins listed there? (see also James 1: 14-15). What does it mean to "deny yourself"? How might it hurt you to deny yourself?

2. **Read Philippians 2:1-8.** How do these verses help us to understand what self-denial “looks like”? **Read Romans 6:1-4 and Romans 12:1-2.** How does the Holy Spirit move us to deny ourselves and follow our Savior? How does God’s forgiveness for us in Christ have a central role in our self-denial?

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Crucifixion was a slow and terrible death reserved for slaves and criminals. The victims were put on display, with their crimes clearly posted, to dissuade others from a life of crime or rebellion. Jesus and his disciples had probably seen condemned criminals carrying their crosses to the place of execution. What might the disciples have thought when they heard Jesus’ command to take up the cross and follow him? What is the cross that each of us must take up?

1. **Read Romans 6:7-14 and Galatians 2:17-21.** How have we, by faith, suffered crucifixion with Christ? What does it mean to be “dead to sin”? How might you experience cross-bearing in your own life? How might self-denial be a form of cross-bearing?
2. **Read Matthew 10:34-39.** How would Jesus, the Prince of Peace, unleash a sword on the earth? What may happen to those who follow Jesus? While in our nation we may not experience death or imprisonment for our faith in Jesus, what cross-bearing trials might you experience for your faith? Share stories you have heard concerning fellow believers around the world for whom cross-bearing means persecution, loss of home and livelihood, imprisonment or death. What can you do to support these suffering brothers and sisters in Christ?

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Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). This Bible study turns our attention from physical exercise to faith exercise. Pick up your cross and follow Jesus as you train in faithfulness, godliness, self-control, love and endurance.

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