

The primary symbol of Christianity is the cross. In the time of Jesus, the cross had symbolized something very different from our understanding. The cross represented the power of Rome and the awful death that awaited anyone who dared to challenge Roman authority. For this reason, Paul writes in II Corinthians 2, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." Through Jesus' sacrifice, a symbol of death became a symbol of life.

Jesus turned the world upside down. How does his teaching in verse 13 challenge the way our world often defines "greatness"? What do the actions of Jesus teach us about God's character and his understanding of what it means to truly love?

For whom would you be willing to lay down your life?

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II Corinthians 12:1-9

Psalm 121 opens with the question, "Where does my help come from?" In the second verse of that same Psalm, we find this response, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." Where do we find help and strength? In today's text, Paul argues that the power of God is revealed most fully as we invite God into our weaknesses.

No further explanation is given to indicate what Paul meant by his "thorn in my flesh." The specific details are not as important as the realization that we are all in need of God's grace. In what areas of your life are you most aware of your need for God?

What do you think God meant by his response to Paul when he said, "My grace is sufficient for you"? In what way might these words bring you hope today?

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Just a few months ago, we looked at these words from Philippians as one of our daily readings for GPS. We return to this familiar text today because it highlights so clearly for us the character of Christ and the calling that we share to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

Verse 3 is a reminder to us that "selfish ambition" has no place in a heart fully surrendered to Jesus. According to verse 5, the specific context where Paul encourages us to adopt the "same mindset" is "in your relationships." How does Paul describe Jesus' humility? Why is humility and the elimination of our selfish ambition so critical in relationships?

Think back to the last time you made a special effort to serve someone else. How did that experience make you feel? How does that experience help you understand your purpose in God's world?

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Luke 23:32-34, 39-43

If there was a time in his life when you expected Jesus to be more worried about himself than others, this would be that moment. Yet, true to his character and his commitment to sacrificing himself for the world, Jesus asks God to forgive his persecutors and offers eternal life to a criminal who shares his agony.

Jesus had instructed his disciples by saying, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." In this scene, we find Jesus putting his teachings into practice. How does this story encourage you to "forgive others as you have been forgiven"?

In talking about the cross on Monday, we said, "Through Jesus' sacrifice, a symbol of death became a symbol of life." What comes to your mind when you think about the cross? How does the cross help you understand in a deeper way God's character and love?

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