**3. The cross**

[*Matthew 16:24*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16:24&version=NASB) *- Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”*

***“take up his cross and follow Me”*** *-* embracing and enduring the sacrifices, troubles, difficulties, persecution, rejection, ridicule, reproach, shame, suffering, and possible martyrdom one may encounter while following Christ

What are you willing to endure for the privilege of following Christ?

How can it help us, when enduring difficulties for following Christ, to remember that suffering is temporary, while life with Christ is eternal?

A Chinese Christian, released after serving twenty years in prison, shared this poem written by his wife just before her death in prison:

“As a real disciple I have dedicated my life hoeing the fields energetically,

Begging for food shamelessly,

Wearing worn-out clothes as if they were formal dresses

Freezing to death at the windy station yet uttering not a word of complaint.

Only if the Gospel would be widely spread

Am I willing to be hung upside down on the cross…with no regret.”

(Standing Strong Through The Storm, A daily devotional message by SSTS author Paul Estabrooks)

Is your life as a real disciple dedicated to whatever suffering you must endure in order that the Gospel would be widely spread?

*Lord, help me to embrace and endure the sufferings of Christ if called on to do so. Remind me to keep my eyes on an eternity with You. Help me to dedicate myself to the spread of the Gospel. Please be with those around the world who are right now enduring great suffering for following Christ. Comfort and strengthen them. Help them to stand firm in the faith and to be bold and courageous in telling others about Christ.*

**4. Laying down your life**

*Matthew 10:38-39 - And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.*

***“lost his life for My sake…”*** - absolute, whole-hearted surrender to Christ; a willingness to give up your hopes, dreams, possessions, friends, family, reputation, career, and even your life in order to follow Christ.

Can your relationship with Christ be described as absolute, whole-hearted surrender to Him?

What are you willing to lose for the privilege of following Christ?

When faced with a choice between the comforts you now enjoy or following Christ, which will you choose?

*Lord, please work in me to produce an absolute, whole-hearted surrender to You. Help me to be willing to lose all things for the privilege of following Christ.*

**5. Maligned**

*Matthew 10:24-25  - “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!*

As you become more like Jesus, how likely is it that you will be maligned?

Are you willing for people to speak evil of you for following Christ?

Prayer based on *1 Peter 2:12*:

*Lord, help me to live such a good life among unbelievers that, though they accuse me of doing wrong, they may see my good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.*