

# the cross-shaped life

A Practical Guide to  
Christian Character

## The Story Church Discipleship Groups | Spring 2021

### Introduction:

Christians believe salvation is all about God's grace, right? No amount of good works can get a person into heaven; only trusting in Jesus can do that. So what's the point of living a good life after deciding you believe in Jesus? Why should Christians subject themselves to discomfort, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline if simply believing in Jesus is enough to punch their tickets to heaven? Part of trusting Jesus means allowing him to shape our lives - not just in eternity - but in the here and now. In this series, we'll explore the ways God's saving grace can transform the believer's character in this life. From your love life to your priorities to your personality, God calls out and equips believers to live lives that are shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ.

### Session 6: Cross-Shaped Struggle

[WATCH THE SERMON HERE](#)

### Discussion Questions:

For Christians, how and when does character transformation happen?

*By the grace of God, and when we gradually surrender more and more of ourselves to God.*

Eph 4:1-2,12-15,17-24 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach all unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

What are the key differences between the spiritual “infants” Paul described and the mature believers “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”?

*Spiritual infants are easily swayed by emotions, trends, and changing social norms. They can be more susceptible to self-indulgence, impurity, and greed. Mature believers are more steady and confident in the foundation on which they stand. They are less given to impulse and indulgence, and more interested in pursuing the righteousness and holiness of God.*

What are some of the ways you’ve experienced “The Struggle” throughout your life? How have your struggles affected you?

*Personal*

Jesus equips his followers to overcome the struggle by teaching us to:

1. \_\_\_\_\_PREPARE\_\_\_\_\_ for the Struggle

What are some of the ways Jesus intentionally prepared his disciples for the struggles they were going to face after his death? (Look at Luke 9 and 10 for some help)

*He showed them how to do the work of spreading the gospel, then he sent them out to do it. When they returned from doing the work, he evaluated their progress. He also prepared them by warning them about certain things and people, by telling them what was going to happen to him, and by teaching them how to pray.*

Before every season of struggle, there is a season of preparation. What are some ways you can use your “downtime” or “slow seasons” more intentionally to prepare for the next struggle?

*Personal*

2. \_\_\_\_\_PRAY\_\_\_\_\_ through the Struggle

What did Jesus do in Luke 11 to further prepare his disciples to overcome their future struggles?

*He taught them how to pray the Lord’s Prayer*

What is the relationship between prayer and faith? If you are lacking enough faith to believe in the power of prayer, where can you get more faith? (see Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:17)

*Prayer is an act of faith. Difficulty praying is often attributable to a deficit of faith. Faith comes from God as a gift to us. If you lack faith, ask God for it, and trust that He will deliver it.*

3. \_\_\_\_\_PERSEVERE\_\_\_\_\_ beyond the Struggle  
Where does the word “persevere” come from, and what does it mean?

*Persevere comes from Latin words meaning “thoroughly severe” and it implies toughness, grit, determination, and ferocity.*

What role do grit and toughness play in overcoming adversity? What does that have to do with Jesus? (See Hebrews 12:2)

*Grit and toughness in tough times can demonstrate a vibrant and growing faithful character in a believer. Jesus took the cross and persevered without condemning the people who nailed him to it. When we learn to respond to the struggle in a similar way, we become more like Christ.*

2 Cor. 6:3-10 - We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

How has the grace of Jesus Christ transformed your character so far?

*Personal*

How would you like to see his grace continue to change your character in the future? Be as specific as possible.

*Personal*

