

SESSION 2

Choices...

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Objective: To help participants to understand that we intentionally pick up our own cross, partnering with God to help build His church.

Icebreaker: “Catch It or Take It?”

Preparation:

Collect as many balls as possible, anywhere from small Nerf® balls to basketballs and footballs.

Mentally take note of the athletic people in the group who also have a solid relationship with the Lord.

Game play:

I need a volunteer who thinks he or she can catch more than one ball at a time. (Select carefully; the person must know Jesus.)

Everyone is going to throw balls to him or her (*not at him or her*), and the selected catcher will try to capture as many of the balls as possible. Go!

Give the participant 30 seconds to see how many they can catch or stop before simply giving up.

Allow some other students to challenge the original volunteer to see if they can catch more balls.

Be prepared for a response “That’s unfair,” if some of the participants receive more aggressive treatment. You could even respond with “You’re right! Did I promise that it would be fair?” You can use that subject later in the discussion, since this is your object lesson. Suffering for our faith in North America will look very different from the suffering that someone in North Korea will encounter.

Sometimes life feels a little like this. What are some hard things that you or someone you know have been through?

How many of you have heard someone say, “This is my cross,” when speaking about difficult situations?

Last time, we talked about how we react to these situations, and how God responds to our hardships and the persecution that many Christians around the world are facing. What did we learn about God and His place in our suffering?

- He is there with us.
- He suffers with us.

This time, we're going to dig into what the Bible was meaning when referring to "your cross." Think about the literal cross that Jesus was nailed upon.

- In those days, were all criminals executed on a cross?
It was used for their worst criminals, like murderers.
- If it was used for the worst criminals, how would the public have seen each of those criminals who had to carry their cross to the place of public execution?
They would have looked down on them. Being executed in front of others was a shameful thing.
- You've probably heard sermons that talk about how painful the cross was. If any of you have heard of or studied the history surrounding that ancient time, do you know of a worse form of execution?
Actually, it was the worst form of execution in the Roman empire.

This is what Jesus *chose* to do for you.

Let's read Luke 9:24. It says, "Take up your cross." It doesn't say that the cross will fall on you, or that you are to carry Jesus' cross. This is your cross, and you actively *pick it up*. What do you think was going through the disciples' minds when Jesus said these words to them?

*They might have been scared, shocked, or even angry.
Call up the original volunteer again.*

Now let's change up [volunteer's name] job. (To the volunteer) I'd like to see how many balls you can pick up. They can be any size. Go!

Give the student 30 seconds to do so. He or she will likely pick up as many small balls as possible.

Great job, [volunteer's name]; but stick around. There's more.

If that were me, I'd probably get through those 30 seconds the easiest way possible. When it comes to the cross we pick up, we tend to want to "take up" whatever cross is the most comfortable. But the cross that Jesus asks us to *take up* requires us to *give up* everything and point people to Jesus; *and we do that because we choose to*. Keep in mind that people who were carrying the cross knew what was at the end of that long walk. Likewise, some Christians are called on to sacrifice for Christ.

Exchange the ball for a cross. Any size will do, since it's the message of the Gospel that takes precedence at this point. Ask the student to give his or her testimony, telling the group what the cross means to him or her. If the volunteer doesn't feel that he or she is prepared, ask for another person, or give your own testimony.

Thank you very much, [volunteer's name]. You can sit down now.

Even if it can make us a little nervous, it's easier to give our testimony here among a group of Christians than in a world that considers Christianity old-fashioned or even a crazy fairy tale. If that's the case, why would we ever want to tell people what the Lord means to us?

They need to hear about Him so they can come to Him.

This is discipleship; to take up *our* own cross and choose to follow Christ, *even if the world hates us*. This is the *only* way that people will come to know Christ.

In *The Shadow of the Cross*, we read:

"It is hard not to fear the threats of persecutors. It is far easier to declare, 'I am not a Christian.' It is even easier to deny Christ by simply keeping silent or by staying hidden. In the midst of persecution, however, only two options are open to the follower of Christ: either confess Him or deny Him...survival is not the critical concern. They go to bear witness. God's messengers cannot be silent. They can only be silenced."¹

"...just as Christ's cross was needed to *establish* His church, our crosses are needed to *build* His church. In order to accomplish Jesus' plan to build His church, both crosses are needed."

²

Wrap-up questions:

1. Acts 9:10,11

If you've heard about the story of Saul (who was later named Paul), you'll know that he persecuted Jesus' followers. What do you think it was like for Ananias to go and lay his hands on Saul and pray for his healing?

2. Acts 9:15

What was God's call to Saul (also known as Paul)?

What do you think God's call is to believers in this 21st century?

3. Colossians 1:24

This book was written by Paul later in his ministry. How did Paul feel about his call to suffer for the church? (Please note that "filling up what is lacking" will be discussed in the next lesson.)

Response:

You may want to give the students a few minutes to write out their testimonies or share them with their friends. If you're not sure that everyone knows the Lord, you could ask for two or three volunteers to give their testimonies in front of the group.

¹ *In the Shadow of the Cross*, p. 134

² *In the Shadow of the Cross*, p. 134