

# 12.0 Theological Reflections

## 12.1 A Theology of the Cross.

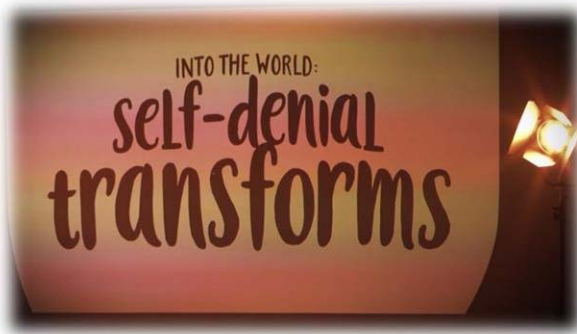
---

**“To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. “Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Living and serving as a Christian is a journey of deep commitment and joy, rooted in selfless love and devotion to God. Jesus beautifully taught his disciples the importance of self-denial, saying, “If anyone wants to follow me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25). Christian living and ministry are divine callings that invite us to embrace faith, perseverance, and the sacred mystery of God's work in the world.



**This is a Ukrainian Cross-  
We carved a similar cross in 2013  
for the Church I served in Sri Lanka**



**A Ukrainian Child despaired.**

Transforming communities requires individuals willing to trust God fully, take bold steps of faith, and face challenges with grace, knowing that growth often emerges from perseverance.

This journey is marked by love for God and for one another, as Paul reminds us in Philippians: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29). True love is demonstrated through steadfast faith and commitment, even in difficult moments.

Martin Luther, in his theological discourse on the cross, highlights the incredible privilege believers have in sharing Christ’s completed work. As disciples, we are invited to experience the depth of His love and the strength that comes from walking in His footsteps. Christ’s journey—His birth, life, and sacrificial love—reveals God’s magnificent plan of salvation. Through Him, we find purpose, strength, and the assurance that every step of faith leads us closer to His divine calling.

The proclamation of the Gospel is a powerful and life-giving mission, bringing salvation and hope to a world in need, as highlighted in Romans 10:9-10. Disciples are called to be the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus, carrying His presence into a broken world. Paul, drawing from Isaiah, emphasizes the beauty of those who bring the message of salvation, stating in Romans 10:15, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

This affirms the privilege and responsibility of sharing the Gospel, which Jesus described as the “Gospel of Peace”—a message that offers reconciliation and new life through His sacrificial love. At the heart of the Gospel is Christ’s atonement, fulfilling the deep longing for redemption within all creation. Paul speaks of creation groaning in anticipation, along with those who have received the Spirit, as they eagerly await the fullness of God’s transformative work. Christ’s arrival ushered in an era of renewed hope and promise, a foretaste of the ultimate redemption yet to come. In the waiting, believers face challenges, much like the pains of childbirth, but with steadfast hope in the joy that lies ahead. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus lovingly challenges His disciples when they seek positions of honor, asking if they are prepared to drink from the same cup of sacrifice.

This cup represents the profound depth of love and commitment required to follow God's calling. In Gethsemane, Jesus models ultimate surrender, demonstrating the beauty of trusting God's plan even in the face of hardship. Henry Nouwen, in his book *Can You Drink the Cup?* reflects on this sacred calling, encouraging disciples to fully embrace their role in God's mission with faith, courage, and joy. In the profound love of a mother bringing new life into the world, we see a reflection of God's transformative power—one that is birthed through perseverance and sacrifice. The early church, though persecuted and opposed, remained steadfast in spreading the good news. Acts 4:18 recounts, *"They summoned them once more and instructed them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus at all."*

Yet, their faith was unwavering because they held firmly to the central hope of the Gospel: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). Christ stands unique in His nature and redemptive work, yet His love is open to all, calling a broken world into restoration. As Paul declares, *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), emphasizing that moral failure is a shared human reality. However, those who receive forgiveness are invited to turn away from sin and embrace Christ, living in His righteousness. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12 offer a powerful encouragement: *"We are pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."* This passage reminds us that through every challenge, Christ's life shines through us. True discipleship calls us to endure with faith so that His love is revealed through our selfless service. Christ assures us of His unwavering presence, declaring, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."* (Hebrews 13:5). The Cross stands as the ultimate testament to this love, demonstrating the mystery of atonement—God's deep desire to redeem and empower humanity. Through the Spirit's power, we are sent as witnesses, filled with His love and strength, to share His hope with the world.