"Paul never glamorized the gospel. It is not success but sacrifice! It's not a glamorous gospel but a bloody gospel, a gory gospel, and a sacrificial gospel!
Leonard Ravenhill

Prayer Study #497
The Message of the Cross
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For the story and message of the cross is sheer absurdity and folly to those who are perishing and on their way to perdition, but to us who are being saved it is the [manifestation of] the power of God.
1st Corinthians 1:18 AMP

A FEW OF THE PROPHETIC SYMBOLS OF THE CROSS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(The whole Bible is a revelation of Jesus and the Cross: "***You search and investigate and pore over the Scriptures diligently, because you suppose and trust that you have eternal life through them. And these [very Scriptures] testify about Me!"***- John 5:39)

1. **THE TREE OF LIFE:** In the Garden of Eden there was no sin, corruption of death, before the Fall, and man lived in the blessing and closeness of God. In the Garden was the Tree of Life from which man did not eat and taste. This was a symbol of the Cross or the New Covenant's Tree of Life. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:9), they were exiled from the Garden because God loved them so much that He did not want man to live eternally in spiritual death, and they would not have died a physical death if they had eaten of the Tree of Life. God allowed death and decay of the physical body in order that spiritual death, the result of being cut off from the Source of Life, Jesus, would not be eternal. They immediately recognized that they were naked, which symbolizes the absence of the Grace of God. Man was now unworthy of Divine honor and was chased from the Tree of Life and the Garden, whose safekeeping was now in the hands of the cherubim and the flaming sword. (Genesis 3:24: *So He drove out the man, and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden, cherubims and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life.) Now,* the only door open to the Tree of Life is through God's only Son. (John 14:6: *Jesus said to him,* ***"I am the Way and***

the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by [through] Me."*)*

God cursed the ground after Adam and Eve's disobedience, and the ground produced thorns (Genesis 3:17-18: *And to Adam He said, Because you have listened and given heed to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it, the ground is under a curse because of you; in sorrow and toil shall you eat [of the fruits] of it all the days of your life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.)* The Tree of Life symbolizes the Cross and the Resurrection Power of the Cross which purify man from sin and from the ancestral curse.

The thorns represent the attractions of this world or those things that prevent people from hearing the Word of God. (Mark 4:18-19: ***And the ones among the thorns are others who hear the Word; then the cares and anxieties of the world and distractions of the age and the pleasure and delight and false glamour and deceitfulness of riches, and the craving and passionate desire for other things creep in and choke and suffocate the Word, and it becomes fruitless.****)*

The crown of thorns was Satan's final attempt to exert his authority over Jesus. (Matthew 27:29-30: *And weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed-staff-in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they made sport of Him, saying, Hail (greetings, good health to You, long life to You), King of the Jews! And they spat on Him and took the reed-staff-and struck Him on the head.)*

The Tree of Transgression is the fig tree whose leaves covered the nakedness of the transgressors, Adam and Eve. By sinning Adam lost being clothed with God's Glory. Our outer garments picture the state of our hearts or our standing with God. (Isaiah 64:6; *For we have become like one who is unclean [ceremonially, like a leper], and all our righteousness (our best deeds of rightness and justice) is like filthy rags or a polluted garment; we all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away [far from God's favor, hurrying us toward destruction].)* The Lord covered our nakedness when He went to the Cross. (Galatians 3: *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.)* (Colossians 3:9-10: *Lie not to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man*

with his deeds and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him Who created him…)

The Tree of Life is found in the Eternal City. (Revelation 2:7: ***"… To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.***) In the New Testament the Cross is four times spoken of as a tree (Acts 5:30, Acts 10:39, Acts 13:39, & 1st Peter 2:24).

2. **THE BITTER WATERS OF MARAH:** (Exodus 15:22-25: *So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD, and the LORD showed him a Tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet….)* At the very first place the Israelites stopped on their journey from Egypt to Canaan, the water is bitter and undrinkable. Even though they had just witnessed the miracle at the Red Sea, they lacked faith and complained. Moses sought the Lord who tells him to throw a specific piece of wood into the water. The bitter waters became sweet. This piece of wood symbolizes the Cross, on which Jesus suffers for His people and on which the sinless Lamb of God bears the consequences for their sins. Genuine believers know that the story of the Cross can bring sweetness into the most bitter of human trials.

3. **THE FIERY BRASS (BRONZE) SERPENT:** *Numbers 21:6-9: And the people spoke against God and against Moses, Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water, and we loathe this light (contemptible, unsubstantial) manna. Then the Lord sent fiery (burning) serpents among the people; and they bit the people, and many Israelites died. So the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, so that He will remove the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent [of bronze] and set it on a pole;*

and everyone who is bitten will live when he looks at it." So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it on the pole, and it happened that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. When Adam sinned, God did not take away the penalty of sin, which is death. He Edid, however, provide a remedy in Jesus Christ, who died in our place on the Cross to pay for our sins. On the Cross Jesus Christ was made a curse for us. (Galatians 3:13: *Christ purchased our freedom [redeeming us] from the curse (doom) of the Law [and its condemnation] by [Himself] becoming a curse for us, for it is written [in the Scriptures], Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree (is crucified)).* Brass (or bronze) in Scripture is the symbol of divine judgment. (Revelation 1:15: *And His Feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace…)* The serpent symbolizes the curse which sin brought. (2nd Corinthians 5:21: *But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ).* The pole symbolizes the Cross. Jesus said in John 12:32-33" ***"And I, if and when I am lifted up from the earth [on the cross] will draw and attract all men [Gentiles as well as Jews] to Myself. He said this to signify in what manner He would die."***

4. **THE PASSOVER LAMB:** The first 12 chapters of Exodus tell the story of how God brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt after ten acts of judgment on Pharaoh and his people. The last of these judgments was the death of the eldest son. The Israelites averted this judgment by telling each family to take a year old male lamb with no defects, to slaughter him, and to roast him, eating the lamb with bitter herbs. Before the meal, the blood of the lamb was to be put on the sides and tops of the door frame which formed a cross. The Lord promised that the death angel would pass over the houses that had blood on the door. (Exodus 12:13: *And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.)* Paul reminds us in 1st Corinthians 5:7: "*Our Passover Lamb is Christ who has already been sacrificed."* Jesus was crucified at Passover. It seems from John's Gospel that Jesus would have been hanging on the Cross at the very time the Passover Lambs were being slaughtered in the temple in preparation for the evening meal (John 18:28). The other

Gospels, however, seem to indicate that the Last Supper with His disciples was the Jewish Passover (Matthew 26:17-18). There is no mention of the presence of a lamb at this meal, perhaps because Jesus deliberately excluded the lamb since He was the one who was to be sacrificed.

5. **THE SMITTEN ROCK:** Exodus 17, similar to the bitter waters of Marah, tells another story of the lack of drinkable water. (Exodus 17:1-7: *All the congregation of the Israelites moved on from the Wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and encamped at Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore, the people contended with Moses and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said to them, Why do you find fault with me? Why do you tempt the Lord and try His patience? But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst? So Moses cried to the Lord, What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said to Moses, Pass on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the rod with which you smote the river [Nile] and go. Behold I will stand before you there on the rock at Mount Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah [proof] and Meribah [contention] because of the faultfinding of the Israelites and because they tempted and tried the patience of the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?)* When Moses struck the rock, water flowed out. The rock symbolizes Jesus, the Rock of our Salvation. (1st Corinthians 10:4: *And they all drank the same spiritual (supernaturally given) drink. For they drank from a spiritual Rock which followed them [produced by the sole power of God Himself without natural instrumentality], and the Rock was Christ.)* The striking of the Rock by the staff represents the Crucifixion of Jesus on the Cross. Later in Numbers 20, when a similar situation arises, Moses is told by God to stand before a rock and speak to it. He is *not* told to strike the rock, but he does so anyway because of his anger towards to people. This disobedience was a big deal to God who punishes Moses for this sin by not allowing him to go into the Promised Land. That point of all of this is this: ***What Jesus did on***

the Cross was sufficient to deal with all sin for all time and does not need to be repeated. His once and for all sacrifice has purchased our eternal redemption.

6. **THE IRON THAT FLOATED:** 2nd Kings 6:1-7: *Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look now, the place where we live near you is too small for us. Please let us go to the Jordan [River] and let each man take from there a beam [for the building]; and let us make a place there for ourselves where we may live." And he answered, "Go." Then one said, "Please be willing to go with your servants." So he answered, "I shall go." So he went with them; and when they came to the Jordan, they cut down [some of] the trees. But it happened that as one was cutting down a beam, the axe head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Oh no, my master! It was borrowed!" The man of God said, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, Elisha cut off a stick and threw it in there, and made the iron [axe head] float. He said, "Pick it up for yourself." So he reached out with his hand and took it.* This is one of the most unusual stories to me in the Bible. At the time of this story Israel was marked by flourishing idolatry and Bal worship was rampant in the land. Yet there were 7000 faithful ones in Israel (1st Kings 19) in Elisha's time who refused to succumb to these practices. Also there were many prophets and many want-to-be prophets. The major prophets of God gathered around them young men who desired to walk in the prophetic and whom the leaders instructed in Scripture and in using correctly the prophetic gift. Elisha had such a company, and the group had grown so large that they needed to build a new structure to house them. Elisha represented the Word and Voice of God to these men, and they refused to go without him. So all of them go to the Jordan to cut down wood for a new building for the ministry. One of these disciples lost his ax head in the Jordan. He was frantic because he was a poor man and had borrowed the ax and was

not financially able to replace it. Also, he knew that his work for the Kingdom of God was not useless without the ax. Elisha, at the instructions of the Lord, cut down a stick and threw it in the water, and the ax head miraculously floated to the surface. This is a story that symbolizes the salvation of a poor, lost sinner by the crucified Christ. The word used for stick in this passage is a Hebrew word that refers to an instrument of death and is often translated "tree," which is a word that often is translated "cross" because of the context. Like the ax head we all are lost before we come to Christ. The Jordan River in scripture is a symbol of death, especially death to self. Like the ax head we are dead in trespasses and sin. The stick Elisha threw in the water to recover the ax head represents the Cross. Because of the Cross, that which was dead was raised to life. The way to God is by way of the Cross. (1st Peter 2:24: *He personally bore our sins in His [own] body on the tree [as on an altar and offered Himself on it], that we might die (cease to exist) to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.)*

THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS OR WHY THE WORLD HATES THE CROSS

A. **The Cross was a scandal to the Jews**. I believe they, not the present day Israeli Jews or the Messianic Jews, represent religious people everywhere. It was this religious spirit that crucified Jesus. The idea that the Messiah was made sin (2nd Corinthians 5:21: *For He has made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him.)* and a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23: *His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall in any wise bury him that day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God)…)* to redeem us from the curse of the law is regarded as offensive to the Jewish religion even to this day. The Gospel message is that we are

helpless to save ourselves and hopelessly lost in sin. Following the Torah or males getting circumcised does not save us. If literally took the death of Jesus to satisfy a holy God's wrath towards us. Apart from God's own intervention and grace, all people would be doomed. Religious people often have a hot head and a cold heart. Religion is in the head. Spiritual life is in the heart. The Lord called us to be spiritual people led by the Spirit, not religious. The worst of religion today is the Islamic Moslem religion. I find great significance that the angel Gabriel, in Daniel 10:12-13, who was bringing a revelation about the Last Days to Daniel, was resisted by the Prince of Persia: *Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for the first day that you did set your heart to understand and to chasten yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I am come for your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the Chief Princes, came to help me, and I remained there with the kings of Persia.* Iran is the country that was Persia during the time of Daniel and is predominately Shiite. The Shiites tend to put absolute authority in the religious clerics whereas the Sunnis typically place absolute authority in the state. I Therefore, I believe that the Prince of Persia is the demonic principality with great power in the world today and pushes Islam, which is a demonic religion.

B. **The Cross was foolishness to the Greeks.** I believe the Greeks represent worldly, humanistic people, carnal, atheistic and agnostic and New Age type people. The image of a crucified man was a symbol of shame to the Greeks and Gentiles. The Greeks esteemed learning, art, knowledge, virtue, and strength. The idea of a god dying on a cross was insane to them. That the Creator would require the sacrifice of an innocent man who was sinless, was immoral and indecent. (1st Corinthians 1:23: *But we preach Christ Crucified, unto the Jews a*

stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness.)
We sometimes forget that another demonic Prince was also trying to hinder Gabriel from getting back from his visit with Daniel after he gave the divine revelation concerning the Last Days to Daniel. This was the Prince of Grecia: Daniel 10:20: *Then said he, know you wherefore I come unto you? And now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.* This prince is now confined to the underworld, but will be released in the last days in order to help the Antichrist (Revelation 17:8-14).

MATTHEW 16:24

NIV: *Then Jesus said to his disciples,* ***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."***

NLT: ***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross and follow me."***

Holman Christian Standard Bible: ***Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me."***

God's Word Translation: ***Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Those who want to come with me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses, and follow Me."***

International Standard Version: ***Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me continuously."***

Weymouth New Testament***: Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If any one desires to follow me, let him renounce self and take up his cross and so be my***

follower.

LUKE 9:23 KJV

Luke adds the very insightful and significant word *daily* in his recording of the Words of Jesus: *And He said to them all,* ***If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.***

This verse gives three requirements for being His disciples:

1. **Deny Self:** To deny self means to renounce all self-dependence, self-interests, self-will, personal strength and ability, and self-pursuits, which are contrary to God's perfect will for our lives. The one who is able to do this denies one's own will and depends totally on Christ. And he walks in the Spirit and not in the flesh. (Galatians 5:19-20: *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, Faith, meekness, temperance,: against such there is no law.)* (Galatians 5:16: *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.)*
2. **Take up Your Cross:** What does it mean to take up your cross?
    a. **To recognize that we are lost and our righteousness is filthy rags, and human effort is insufficient to attain righteousness.** No matter how good we are, it will never be good enough to merit eternal life with Jesus in heaven. We can be justified, just as if we had never sinned, only by our faith in the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. The good news is the blood is available to whosever will, no matter how much you have sinned and failed. (Isaiah 64:6: *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade, as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.)* (Zechariah 3:3-4: *Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and stood before the Angel. And He[the Lord] answered and spoke unto those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with change of*

raiment.) Ephesians 1:7: *In Whom we have Redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.)* (Colossians 1:14: *In Whom we have Redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins.)* (Hebrews 10:19-20: *Having therefore, Brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us through the Veil, that is to say, His flesh.*) (1st Peter 1:18-19: *Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers but with the Precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.)*

b. **To live in the recognition that we are *dead* in trespasses and sin, and that our flesh and old nature (including ego and self-sufficiency) was crucified with Christ.** (Galatians 2:20a: *I am Crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me…)* (2nd Corinthians 5:14-17: *For the Love of Christ constrains us because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead, and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.)*

c. **To accept without bitterness and self-pity persecution and suffering as part of our taking up our cross and walking with Him.** (2nd Timothy 3:12: *Yes, and all who will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.)* 1st Corinthians 4:12b-13: *…being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it. Being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.)* (2nd Corinthians 4:8-10: *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.)* (Philippians 3:10: *That I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.)*

d. **To understand that this world is not our home and to walk,**

with humility, in the world as a stranger and alien. (Hebrews 11:13-16: *These all* [those in the Hall of Faith who believed Christ would come, even though He did not come in their lifetimes] *died in Faith, not having received the Promises, but having see them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they who say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an Heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared for them a city.)*

e. **To recognize that Christianity is the *only* way of salvation, even when this truth is not politically correct.** There is no other way that men will be saved except through Jesus and all other religions-Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, Scientology, and all the rest are false and doctrines of demons. Accepting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is the only way to be forgiven by God. (John 14:6: *Jesus said unto Him, **"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes unto the Father, but by Me."***) (John 30-33: ***I and My Father are One.*** **Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of those works do you stone Me? The Jews answered Him, saying, For a good work we stone You not, but for blasphemy and because You, being a man, make Yourself God.**

3. **Follow Him:** Jesus is telling His followers that they must habitually and continually follow Him, regardless of the price-even death. Like the Remnant in Revelation 12:11 (*And they overcame Him* [Satan] *by the Blood of the Lamb* and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death), they will follow Jesus even when it is not convenient and popular. (Luke 9:62: *And Jesus said unto him, **No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.***) (John 10:27: ***My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**.)*

<u>AN EXAMPLE OF LIVING OUT MATTHEW 16:24</u>

George Mueller was a wonderful man of faith who fed and clothed,

first 1000 children, and later 2000, in the orphanages he built in Bristol in the latter 19th Century. He also gave away thousands of pounds to Christian work: money he received in answer to prayer. It is recorded that when someone asked the secret of his service, he replied: "There was a day when I died." As he spoke, he bent lower, until he almost touched the floor. He continued, "Died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." Author Unknown