

Judges Chapter 8 v 1 - 21

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. A very warm welcome to all of you this morning, particularly those visiting us, some folk from Wales and Newcastle and perhaps other places too. Particularly, you'll find out a little bit later on, a warm welcome to United Beach team who are here with us, or some of them anyway, some of our other churches in the town supporting them, and we'll hear a little bit about them, but it's lovely to have you with us. It's that time of year again. We're back to the summer, as you can see by the lovely weather that we've got outside. It's Whitby summer again, but it's good that we can be together. So many reasons for us to come together on a Sunday, so many reasons for us to rejoice in God's goodness, so many reasons for us to thank him for his faithfulness, but the greatest reason of all is what's found in this verse in Psalm 130, verse 4. Just the verse prior to this verse says this, if you, Lord, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence or with fear, serve you. The best thing about God is he is a forgiving God. That's the best thing that we have. Whatever else we do not have, whatever else we do have, if we don't have that forgiveness of sins, then we, everything else is worthless really. But to have our sins forgiven, to have peace with God, to know that he accepts us, receives us, is all the reason we need to worship, to serve, to praise, to love him. And so we're going to stand and sing our first hymn, which speaks about the desire to worship God, not just on a Sunday, but all through our lives. 144, all my days, I'll sing this song of gladness. Let's stand as we sing. Let's continue in our worship of him.

Our most glorious and marvelous God in heaven, we do come to you this morning with a great song of gladness, a song of joy, though there may be other things in our hearts that cause us sorrow or grief.

Yet, Lord, we thank you that when we think of you and particularly of your son, the Lord Jesus, we cannot help but find our hearts lifted up, cannot help but find our souls caused to rejoice when we think of your love to us, your salvation towards us, your wonderful grace. For, Lord, we confess, yes, that we are sinful people, foolish people, and Lord, people who have turned away from you again and again. But, Lord, we thank you that for us, for us who have put our faith and trust in Jesus, for us who have received the wonderful gift of life that he has purchased at the cross, for us there is full and complete and absolute and everlasting forgiveness. Thank you, O Lord, that it's all at the price of Jesus, that the purchase that he made for us, where he paid our debt, where he died in our place, where he suffered for our sins. We're so grateful, O Lord, that though we continue to get it wrong and we continue to muck it up, and even today and in this week, Lord, we've done that. Yet, Lord, we know that you will not hold our sins against us because the full and complete and final and total atonement for our sins has been done at Calvary. And so we come, Lord, with joy. We come, Lord, with thanksgiving that, Lord, you're not a God who will change his mind. You'll not forgive us one day and then hold our sins against us another day. You're not like us, O Lord, fickle and faltering and one minute doing the right thing, next minute doing the wrong thing. You are consistently, perfectly, eternally righteous. And we come to you, O Lord, our God, again in and through Jesus, your Son. We come to you, O Lord, our Father, because we need you. We need your help. We need your touch. We need your Holy Spirit. Lord, we cannot walk a single step a single day except that you sustain us, strengthen us and help us. Lord, we would have easily, Lord, given up on the Christian life and fallen away and walked away if it wasn't for you, keeping and sustaining. And so, Lord, we come and pray that you would draw near to us by your Holy Spirit. Draw near to strengthen those who are weak.

Draw near, Lord, to comfort those who mourn. Draw near, O Lord, we pray, to correct those, Lord, who are in sin, to bring salvation to those who are still lost. O Lord, work and minister, we pray today by your Holy Spirit and through your wonderful Word, the Bible. Speak to us and bless us, we ask.

[4 : 55] And so, we thank you that we can come and that, Lord, you receive and accept us. Receive our praise and worship too. May our lives overflow with that worship and praise, with that service that comes from the knowledge of sins forgiven. For we ask it all in and through. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

We're going to turn together now in God's Word, in our Bibles, to Judges and Chapter 8. Judges Chapter 8, if you've got one of the Church Bibles, that's page 250. Page 250 in the Church Bible.

Thank you for those who looked after things while I was away last week. But we've been going through the life of Gideon, a short biography of the life of Gideon, over the past couple of months. And we've seen how the Lord has taken him from being a fearful young man, hiding away from the Midianites, who were a huge band of basically terrorists who would come in and kill people and take the food and take the cattle and go again. And taken him from being that scared young man to being the leader of God's army, the army of God's people. And with 300, sort of shattered the army of Midian, caused them to scatter, to run. And this is sort of the aftermath of the battle as the enemy is fleeing away. And we find out what happens next. So we'll read from verse 1 through to verse 21.

Now the Ephraimites, that's one of the other tribes of Israel, asked Gideon, Gideon, why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?

They challenged him vigorously. But he answered them, what have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiza?

[7:10] God gave Oreb and Zeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you? At this, their resentment against him subsided. Gideon and his 300 men, exhausted, yet keeping up the pursuit, came to Jordan and crossed it. He said to the men of Succoth, give my troops some bread, they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zeba and Zulmana, the kings of Midian. But the officials of Succoth said, do you already have the hands of Zeba and Zulmana in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops? Then Gideon replied, just for that. When the Lord has given Zeba and Zulmana into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briars. From there he went up to Peniel, made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Succoth had. So he said to the men of Peniel, when I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower. Now Zeba and Zulmana were in

Karkor with a force of about 15,000 men, all that was left of the armies of the eastern peoples. 120,000 swordsmen had fallen. Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobar and Jogbah and attacked the unsuspecting army. Zeba and Zulmana, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army. Gideon, son of Joash, then returned from the battle by the pass of Heres. He caught a young man of Succoth and questioned him. The young man wrote down for him the names of the 77 officials of Succoth, the elders of the town. Then Gideon came and said to the men of Zulmana, here are Zeba and Zulmana, about whom you taunted me by saying, do you already have the hands of Zeba and Zulmana in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men? He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Zulmana a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briars. He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.

Then he asked Zeba and Zulmana, what kind of men did you kill at table? Men like you, they answered, each one with the bearing of a prince. Gideon replied, those were my brothers, the sons of my own mother. As surely as the Lord lives, if you'd spared their lives, I would not kill you.

Turning to Jethar, his eldest son, he said, kill them. But Jethar did not draw his sword because he was only a boy and was afraid. Zeba and Zulmana said, come do it yourself. As is the man, so is his strength.

So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, took the ornaments off their camels' necks. Please open your Bibles to Judges in chapter 8. That's page 250. Page 250 if you've got the church Bible.

[10:11] And we're going to consider this event in the life, or these events really, there's three particular events in the life of Gideon. We've already seen how he's been triumphant in one sense in this great battle with the Midianites. And then we'll see what happens afterwards. Now most of you know that recently myself and Mike were away in Germany and France, motorcycling, and we went down to the south of Germany and to eastern France, where there are the foothills of the Alps, and some very enjoyable riding as well. From the tops of those hills and mountains, there were glorious vistas and views and scenes of wonderful beauty overlooking both of those countries, even into Switzerland as well.

But of course for every mountaintop experience, there always has to be a valley, and it has to be something that we go down to. Valleys to be passed through before we ascend again. Mountaintop experiences and valley shadows are the common lot of every one of us.

Gideon not accepted. He was a man who knew what it was to stand on the mountaintop after this great victory. He had had this incredible, glorious, miraculous work of God before his eyes, as with just 300 men.

He had faced 135,000 armed soldiers and defeated them and sent them scattering. And we can only begin to feel the sense of euphoria and joy and excitement and thrill at having won that battle. But as we move on from that initial triumph, we find that Gideon is plunged from the mountaintop into the valley on three occasions. Three valleys of sorrow, three valleys of grief that he faces as he continues to serve God. And so it is with us.

It seems almost inevitable that after every mountaintop, there's a valley in life. After every really enjoyable experience or really good time, there comes very soon a down time, a hard time, a time of trial, a time of difficulty. That's true for the believer as well. It's true for the Christian as it is for every single person. If we follow Christ, if we trust him and seek to live in obedience to God, then we will experience in our lives a mixture of good times and bad, of joy and sorrow. That can be a real struggle for us. That can be a real difficulty for us. How is it, God, that when I trust you, my life isn't easy? Sometimes something of that message may be put across, that if you follow Jesus, all your problems will be solved. And certainly following Christ is the best and most wonderful life to live. But the reality is that for the Christian, following Christ means that there will be struggles, trials, valleys, hardships and griefs. And that can test our faith.

[13 : 19] We can feel, has God left me in those valleys? If he was with me in the mountaintop, is that the only place I can find him? And so on. We can find ourselves struggling. The children's chorus that many people learned, perhaps when they were younger and sometimes sing, count your blessings one by one and you'll be surprised at what the Lord has done, shows that we are a people who are greatly blessed.

And following Jesus is indeed one spiritual blessing after another, one mountaintop experience of God's goodness. But how often do we sing about the blows that we receive from others, the suffering that comes from the hands of other people? And all of Gideon's valley experiences here, all of his griefs are because of the way others react to him and treat him. It's not because God has given up on him, not because he's wandered from the Lord in any way. Rather, those valleys are from the attitudes and sinful actions of others. So where are you this morning? Are you on a mountaintop? Are you in a valley? Are you on the way up or the way down? Whatever you are, whatever you sense or feel yourself to be, then I trust that from God's word we will have some help. Let's look at these three valley experiences, these three put-downs, as it were, that Gideon faces, these three trials that come from the hands of others. First of all, the very beginning of chapter 8, we find that he suffers from unjust criticism. The Ephraimites, one of the tribes of Israel, spoke harshly against him. We're told that they challenge him vigorously. They criticize him. Criticize him because he had left them out of the battle. He hadn't invited them to come and share in the glory of the battle with those 300. They felt slighted. They felt as if they were sidelined. And Gideon could have rightly said to them, look, this was God's doing, not mine. There's nothing to do with me. It wasn't my choice. God chose these men. God, but he doesn't in that way. They wanted to share in the glory. And they felt that they had been put down badly by Gideon. With amazing wisdom and amazing tact, Gideon replies to them, doesn't he?

He points out that the fact that they were given the honor of capturing and killing two of the main leaders of the Midianite forces was something to be gloried in, something much greater, something much better than him destroying just ordinary soldiers and putting them to flights. He massages their ego, we might say. And so they go away feeling superior to Gideon, which is what they wanted all along.

Think of this, poor Gideon. Well, not poor Gideon, but there's Gideon. He has faithfully served God. He's faithfully engaged in a battle in which he could have lost his life with just a few hundred men. He's been faithful to God and been the savior literally of the country. And immediately he's criticized. Immediately there's fault finding with him. The sad truth is that it's within our nature, our sinful nature that it is, to find fault with others. We find, sadly, some pleasure in belittling others, in putting them down because it means that we can exalt ourselves. There's a critical spirit which, sadly, all of us struggle with. Criticism, we may say, well, it's only words and sticks and stones and all those sort of things. But actually, these words of criticism are extremely painful, aren't they? We know that criticism can be a very destructive, poisonous weapon when used against us. I know myself personally of several pastors who've left the ministry because of criticism, of fault finding, of pulling them down. And others on the mission field and other godly Christians who've sought to live for the Lord and worked for the gospel have found themselves crushed simply because of words spoken against them, faults found with them. And so, dear friends, we must be very, very guarded about how we speak. We must be very, very careful about our use of the tongue. We have that all the way through the Bible and its teaching. James particularly talks about that. But we need to ask ourselves, before we criticize somebody, certain questions, I believe. Before we are critical, we need to ask ourselves, what's the motivation behind my criticism? It seems the Ephraimites' criticism came from their pride, their ego. They're wanting to be, appear to be the ones who were the saviors of Israel. They wanted to share in the honor. They felt as if they were being put aside because they weren't treated as important and special. What's the motivation for my criticism of another person? Is it because I'm jealous that they've taken some limelight or received some praise and I want that praise? I feel inferior and if in some way I can criticize them, it can make me feel better. Was my criticism genuinely motivated by a desire to protect them from harming themselves, from a fault which is actually possibly going to lead to greater harm for them or for others as well? Why am I saying this critical thing?

Secondly, is the fault that I perceive in them really deserving of criticism at all? Does it really matter? Do I need to point it out? Do I need to pick them up on this thing or not?

[19 : 02] I may not like the color or the pattern of the tie they're wearing, but really do I have to tell them that? Or is it just a matter of me looking for some faults? Sometimes it's much better, dear friends, for us to shut up than to speak. Much better to bear with one another rather than to speak our mind.

There's a difference, dear friends, between honesty and rudeness, between bluntness, straightforwardness and insensitivity. Dear friends, we need to ask, do I need, do I need to pick up this fault in this person? And thirdly, of course, dear friends, we need to ask ourselves, have I actually examined the faults in my own life? Have I sought to put those faults in my life right before I start to sort out another person's failings? I'm so quick to find their faults that actually I sort of brush over my own. Just remember these words of Jesus as he wrote, as he spoke to his disciples from the Sermon on the Mount. He said this, Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there's a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Is that how we are? Have we looked for specks of dust in people's lives which we can find fault in and not ourselves? But what about receiving criticism? How are we to deal with criticism? Because people do criticize and people will be critical of us. How do we respond to that? How do we react to that? As I said, Gideon didn't respond as he could have done. He could have responded quite strongly and harshly towards them, but actually he gave them a soft answer which turned away their wrath. The question is this, why am I upset at being criticized? Is it because my pride is hurt? My ego is damaged? Is it because I think that I'm above reproach or criticism? Secondly, ask myself, is their criticism justified? Perhaps they've brought this with a right motive. They pointed out something that actually I need to deal with and should deal with. Have I spoken or acted in a wrong way that needs to be pulled up? And thirdly, remember this, dear friends, that when we're criticized, if they really knew all the faults that I have in my life, they'd find much bigger things to criticize than just that. Just remember, dear friends, that there is so much worse in my heart and your heart than we actually show or reveal. So this criticism may well be justified. But most of all, dear friends, surely our desire, our goal must be this. Whenever I speak, am I seeking to build my brother or sister up? Are my words words of encouragement? Are my words words of strengthening to them? Can I actually turn it around? Can I look for things in somebody else's life which I can praise? Not to build them up, not to blow their heads up so they become, but can I look for words of encouragement? How many of us delight and find words of encouragement so great, just a small word? It can make a difference, can't it? On a low day, in a valley time. If only the Ephraimites had said to Gideon, praise God that he raised you up and used you and that we had a share in it too.

Criticism. I wonder how you're feeling. Perhaps it's at work. Perhaps it's at school. Perhaps it's even in your own family or relationships. Or perhaps it's even in the church. Sadly, we're not clear of that sin. Is there a criticism in there? Perhaps you're feeling it. Dear friends, let us look to the Lord that we might encourage one another. The next challenge that Gideon faces is on two fronts.

It's from the men of Succoth and the men of Peniel. And really, I've called it unfaithful callousness. Callousness is a hardness of heart, a hardness towards someone, an uncaring attitude. Unfaithful callousness. Think about it. Gideon and his men have been fighting this battle and now they're fighting a running battle as they're pursuing the enemy. They need food, of course. They need water to continue.

Even 300 men need to be supplied so they can pursue and they can remove and destroy the remaining threat. No doubt they would have had supplies as they went to the battle, but there's only so much you can carry and those supplies have been used. They're all gone. And so naturally, they turn to their fellow Israelites. They turn to their fellow patriots, in one sense, for aid. After all, the battle was for their sakes. Gideon and others were fighting for the men of Succoth and fighting for the men of Peniel. They were fighting against their enemies who persecuted them and robbed them and killed them over many years. But they refuse. They refuse to give them even bread, though they're tired and exhausted and exhausted and hungry. That refusal to give them food is not just a matter of greed, keeping to themselves, or unkindness. It's an act of treachery against them. They're refusing to help Gideon and the army of Israel, their army. They're refusing to take their side in the battle. In other words, they're actually taking the side of the enemy against God's army by not supporting them, by not giving to them and caring for them. Their words, of course, show that really they thought

[24 : 53] Gideon wouldn't be able to capture Zeba and Zalmunna. Their words were the thought that, well, actually, they're going to get away from you and they're going to come back. And if we've helped you, then we're going to be in trouble. But actually, it's an act of cowardice, isn't it, on their part? And that explains why Gideon takes such severe action against them, doesn't he?

And they think, well, that's a bit over the top. They only refused you some bread and they're punishing them with thorns and briars and even killing the men of Peniel. But they were, in effect, helping the enemy by not supporting their own troops. It was a betrayal, a serious betrayal, a serious act, withholding from God's army, from God's people, what they needed, supporting the enemy of God's people, taking sides against God. Now, dear friends, Gideon's example shows us just how much we need to support one another in the local church. That's why God has put us in a local church. It's not by accident that we're in a local church. It's not simply because that's a tradition that we should belong to a local church if we're Christians. It's imperative that we are part of a local church, that we can support one another, care for one another, help one another in the battle that we all are engaged in. And if we do not play our part, if we withhold this encouragement, the support, the service that we can give, then we are weakening the work of God's people. It's a serious matter. It's something that, again,

Paul spoke so much about in his letter to the Corinthians, which we've studied recently. The imperative of support, the imperative of every part of the body of Christ giving and sustaining one another. Here's Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. And he goes on to say later on in verse 15, now if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop belonging to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. So you, dear friends, each of us who are part of the local church here, if you're part of our local church elsewhere, you're an imperative part of that body. And playing your part and doing that which God has given you to do is essential. And using the gifts that God has given you to do is essential for the strengthening, for the sustaining, for the working of the church together. Now yes, that does include financial support. Yes, we can say that, but that's not all. Putting our money in the collection each week is not all that means to support the church of Jesus Christ. It means supporting others in their service, coming alongside them and helping them in the work that they do, whether it be in evangelism or in caring. We're all in it together. We are one people, one body. As Paul puts it later on in that same chapter, verse 26, if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Let me lay that challenge before you then, dear friends.

In the battle, in the life of the church, am I playing my part to the full? Am I giving of myself sacrificially at times, serving, costly, or am I actually really not doing anything at all?

Am I supporting the church? Am I working? This is part of the Christian life. This is part of the encouragement. This is part of the help. This is part of the building up of the church. We need one another, and we need to know that we are needed by one another. And then we come to the very final, and probably the most, well, almost certainly the most painful challenge that Gideon comes across.

[29 : 15] He's known this undeserved, unjustified criticism. He's known this unfaithful callousness.

But then he meets with something for worse. He meets with unmerciful cruelty. Verses 18 to 21. At last, Gideon captures these two kings, these two ringleaders, as it were, of this terrorist network, which is what they were, terrorizing the nation, bringing suffering for seven years. At last, the two heads, if it were, the bin ladens, as it were, are caught. And he interrogates them about what they've been doing and who they've been killing. And he finds out from them that they have been responsible for the murder of some of his own family, some of his own brothers.

Now, we don't know exactly when this happened. We're not told. This is the only reference to it here in verse 18. It could have happened before Gideon meets with the Lord and sets about this challenge. It may have happened while the army was fleeing from the battlefield that they killed people on their way. We don't know. All we know is that Gideon's family have been murdered. The battle that he's been engaged with has been for that very purpose of safeguarding the nation, and of course, his own family as well. And so the victory that he has won is a bittersweet victory.

Sweet in the sense that the enemy has been crushed, but bitter because he himself has lost his own loved ones. And after giving his young son, probably a teenage boy, the opportunity for revenge, Gideon himself kills these two kings in retaliation for their robbing him of his brothers. It's clear that it's not for any other reason he kills them. He doesn't kill them because they're the enemies of God's people and deserve to be punished and put to death. He makes it very clear that if they hadn't killed his family, he'd have let them go. But this is directly a personal matter of revenge and retaliation against them. And we can understand something of that, surely. We can understand his motives for killing these evil men, and they were evil. But is revenge how we should respond to people's cruelty? Is revenge how we should respond to people's callousness or to people's criticism?

When we're attacked, the natural response is to feel anger, maybe to want to lash out against that person with word or action or with cold shouldering them or whatever it may be, because they've treated us in this way. Are we to follow Gideon's example here? Of course we're not. We have somebody's example which is far greater than this. We do not follow Gideon, do we, dear friends? We follow Christ.

[32 : 08] And our Lord Jesus Christ has set for us a great example about how we are to act when we are suffering. When we are suffering because people are critical or uncaring or because they're cruel. We're to respond as he responded when he was in the most severe trial, when he was in the darkest place in his life, when he was hung upon the cross. For there we have, as it were, a path unmistakably laid out for us to follow. And we can see that on the cross those three attacks that Gideon endured are displayed in much greater fashion against Jesus. The criticism, the words, those poisonous words spoken against Gideon were nothing compared to the words of those who gathered around the cross as Jesus was there suffering for the sins of his people. Remember how the people and the religious leaders jeered at him, we're told, and poured contempt upon him. How those religious leaders were the ones who spoke. He saved others but he can't save himself, mocking. How much those words must have pierced his own heart, as did the very nails pierce his hands. And then of course there was the betrayal from those who should have given him support. Think of Judas, who he had cared for and befriended and taken under his wing for those three years. The one who'd shared the bread with him and those, the one who then lifted up his heel against him. How that must have hurt him. Yes, he knew that betrayal was coming. He knew.

But he also knew as well the cowardice of the disciples on the night of his arrest, running away from him. No, he was left utterly bereft and alone upon the cross. Deserted, betrayed and failed.

Then of course there was the unimaginable cruelty of the cross. Those Roman soldiers who beat him and flogged him, placed a crown of thorns upon him and then nailed him on that cruel cross to suffer a most unimaginable and painful death. What was Jesus' response to those people when they scorned him and mocked him, criticized him as it were? Did he speak back words of venom against them?

Of course he didn't. When Judas and the others either betrayed or left him, did he curse them in his own heart and say, what sort of friends are they? And when the soldiers nailed and beat and then gambled for his clothing, was his response to curse them too and to call down judgment upon them.

Now we know very much what the words of Jesus were on the cross, weren't they? Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Unjustified attacks.

[35 : 12] Isn't that the greatest challenge that you and I face, dear friends? In the valley, in that place where we feel the lash of people's tongues and the hardness of people's hearts.

When we feel cut off and let down. When we feel even their cruelty and malice against us at times. Isn't the greatest challenge, not how do we cope with those things, but isn't the greatest challenge inwardly that I must forgive them?

That I mustn't hold it against them? When my heart says, harbor a grudge. When inwardly I want to seek revenge and look for a way in the future to belittle or to upset them.

Isn't my challenge to forgive them wholeheartedly as Christ did? One day Peter came to Jesus and asked him this question.

Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times. That's good, isn't it? Seven times. If only we could do that, that would be quite amazing.

[36 : 23] Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times. Where are you, dear friends, at the moment? Perhaps on the mountain?

Praise God for that. Rejoice in it. Enjoy it. Perhaps suffering something of the slings and arrows of discontent in life. May the Lord give us grace and help us that whatever we face, that we may know his grace to forgive as he forgave us.

Let's pray together now. Lord Jesus, to be a Christian means to follow in your footsteps.

Not just follow in seeking to do what is right. Not just follow in seeking to please and obey God and serve one another. But to follow in your footsteps, Lord Jesus, means, as you put it quite plainly, taking up the cross daily.

And we know that following you includes sorrow and grief and challenge and heartache from others, from their actions or their words and their deeds. And so, Lord, we ask that you would give to us grace to forgive as you forgave us and as you forgave those who persecuted you.

[37 : 48] Give us that like spirit, we pray. We know as well, O Lord, that at times we can be the cause and have been the cause of other people's valleys.

We've been the ones who've spoken critically and unthinkingly or harshly. We've been the ones who haven't supported, cared for and given because, well, we're greedy and selfish.

We've been the ones who even, Lord, have spoken with malice and cruelty or how we feel ashamed at ourselves. We ask you to forgive us for such attitudes, such lifestyles, such ways.

And again, pour out your Holy Spirit upon our hearts and lives that we may be not only forgiving of others, but that we might be loving and do all things in love. We thank you for the church you've given us, our local church, our local fellowship of brothers and sisters.

And again, we know that we will sin against one another, but we ask that we might not do it meaningfully or intently, but we might do it mistakenly. We know that we will fail one another and there will be many things that could be criticised about us, but we ask, oh Lord, that we might bear with one another in love, that we might be forgiving and supportive and playing our part and strengthening the work of the gospel here and wherever you've placed us.

[39 : 10] And Lord, we thank you that you are the God who is able to heal the brokenhearted. Thank you, Jesus, that you're the one of whom it was spoken, a bruised reed he will not break and a smoking flax, a wick he will not extinguish.

You're the God who knows how to heal the brokenhearted. And so I do want to pray for those even this morning here who know something of that brokenheartedness because of the actions and words and deeds of others.

I pray that you would heal and comfort, pour in your balm, that, Lord, you would make whole. We ask these things again as we bring ourselves to you, Lord, in need of your grace.

Amen. Our final hymn is...