

# Take Up Your Cross

Take up your cross and follow me. That's an interesting thing to say to a group of people. Today we share what Jesus meant when he said that.

## Introduction

Jesus said many things when he was preaching and teaching. Some things he said to large crowds, some things he said to individuals, and some things he said just to his disciples. He had a way of simplifying a thought so that a child could understand it. He also had a way to say things so that people would not understand. Whether it was too simple to be true or too difficult or painful, it was a hard saying.

Today we want to look at something Jesus said as he was teaching, "Take up your cross and follow me."

It is important to understand what is going on in the ministry of Jesus at this point. Jesus had finished preaching and teaching to over 5000 people and miraculously fed them with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. He then left there with his disciples and started to talk with them privately.

Let's read Luke 9:18-20

Luke 9:18-20

(18) Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" (19) They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." (20) "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah."

He asked his disciples who people said he was and then he asked them who they thought Jesus was. Peter answered wisely and full of the Spirit when he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and Jesus praised him for it.

Then Jesus started teaching the disciples.

## Deny Yourself

Let's read Luke 9:23

Luke 9:23

(23) Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

This is a very interesting thing to say. The disciples had been with him for some time now and were already following him. They were already relying on him for their daily needs like food, water, and shelter as they traveled.

They knew how to deny themselves because they had been denying themselves the whole time they had been with him. But what did he mean to take up their cross daily? Did he mean that each of them should be carrying around a 3-meter-tall Roman cross wherever they went?



The Roman cross was a gruesome sight. It was a symbol of suffering and shame. It was the sentence for criminals. Why in the world would Jesus say this? What does it mean?

Jesus wanted his followers to be fully committed to his plan for man's salvation and restoration to God. There was no room for any selfish ambitions or motives. There was no room for personal time or space. There was no identity available other than that of Jesus follower. There was no time for individuality other than what the Lord gave them.

To deny themselves, meant to fully give up all of their own dreams and desires, plans and thoughts, hopes and dreams, and take on the dreams, desires, plans, thoughts, hopes, and dreams of Jesus himself.

They had to deny themselves. This is so difficult. We want to stand up for our rights. We want to stand up for justice and what is fair. We have our dreams and aspirations. Yet Jesus tells us to deny ourselves.

We must put others before ourselves. It is not good enough to just put our family or our friends before ourselves. We must put our enemies before ourselves. We must put every one of the 7.5 billion (7,500,000,000) people on earth before ourselves.

### Take Up Your Cross Daily

But that's not the strange part of what he said. He then said after denying ourselves, we must take up our cross daily. In that day it was common for criminals to be forced to carry their own cross to the place of their execution. That was part of the humiliation intended to serve as a warning to others.

What Jesus was telling his disciples was they needed to take on his life. They needed to live their life the way he was living his. They needed to give up everything he had given up. This meant they needed to forsake their family, their house, their property, and any other comforts of this life.

They had to take on the reproach and scorn of this world. They needed to live in total dependence on God. They needed to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. They needed to share a message with people that was not popular and often would find them against the accepted religious and political leaders of the time. They needed to pour out their lives for others and die to themselves and their own personal place in this world. They had to do these things every day. We need to do these things every day.

But here is the good part. When we do this, as unusual and strange as it sounds, we give up our lives, but we gain Jesus' life. We become sons and daughters of God Most High. We have a place at the dinner table alongside Jesus as co-heirs of all of creation.

### Follow Me

This takes a daily decision. This is not something you can do once and then you are set for life. We must daily examine our lives, our motives, our actions and see if they match what Jesus told us to do.

Do your daily actions and motives line up with denying yourself in all things, taking up your own cross, and following Jesus. Do you do that in the marketplace as well as at home? Do you do that at school as well as in your neighbor's home?



It is easy to fall into the natural way of looking out for yourself and allowing routines and inconveniences to sway you away from Jesus.

It should be plain to see that you are following Jesus in your life. It should be the same at home, with your church group, in school, at work, in the market, and wherever else you find yourself. People should see Jesus when they look at you.

This takes daily devotion and prayer. It takes a heart fully surrendered to Jesus. There is nothing of yourself you can hang onto and expect to fulfill all that God has made and ordained you for. The good part is as you deny yourself and give up your dreams, hopes, and desires, the Lord gives you new dreams, hopes, and desires, that are so much greater than what you had.

### Conclusion

Today, we encourage you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus every day.

You will enter your heavenly reward by unashamedly following Jesus in all your ways and actions everywhere you go.

