

**Question: "What did Jesus mean when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23)?"**

**Answer from Got Questions.org:** Let's begin with what Jesus didn't mean. Many people interpret "cross" as some burden they must carry in their lives: a strained relationship, a thankless job, a physical illness. With self-pitying pride, they say, "That's my cross I have to carry." Such an interpretation is not what Jesus meant when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

When Jesus carried His cross up Golgotha to be crucified, no one was thinking of the cross as symbolic of a burden to carry. To a person in the first-century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: death by the most painful and humiliating means human beings could develop.

Two thousand years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace, and love. But in Jesus' day, the cross represented nothing but torturous death. Because the Romans forced convicted criminals to carry their own crosses to the place of crucifixion, bearing a cross meant carrying their own execution device while facing ridicule along the way to death.

Therefore, "**Take up your cross and follow Me**" means being willing to die in order to follow Jesus. This is called "dying to self." It's a call to absolute surrender. After each time Jesus commanded cross bearing, He said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:24-25). Although the call is tough, the reward is matchless.

Wherever Jesus went, He drew crowds. Although these multitudes often followed Him as Messiah, their view of who the Messiah really was—and what He would do—was distorted. They thought the Christ would usher in the restored kingdom. They believed He would free them from the oppressive rule of their Roman occupiers. Even Christ's own inner circle of disciples thought the kingdom was coming soon (Luke 19:11). When Jesus began teaching that He was going to die at the hands of the Jewish leaders and their Gentile overlords (Luke 9:22), His popularity sank. Many of the shocked followers rejected Him. Truly, they were not able to put to death their own ideas, plans, and desires, and exchange them for His.

Following Jesus is easy when life runs smoothly; our true commitment to Him is revealed during trials. Jesus assured us that trials will come to His followers (John 16:33). Discipleship demands sacrifice, and Jesus never hid that cost.

In Luke 9:57-62, three people seemed willing to follow Jesus. When Jesus

questioned them further, their commitment was half-hearted at best. They failed to count the cost of following Him. None was willing to take up his cross and crucify upon it his own interests.

Therefore, Jesus appeared to dissuade them. How different from the typical Gospel presentation! How many people would respond to an altar call that went, "Come follow Jesus, and you may face the loss of friends, family, reputation, career, and possibly even your life"? The number of false converts would likely decrease! Such a call is what Jesus meant when He said, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

If you wonder if you are ready to take up your cross, consider these questions:

- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of your closest friends?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of your reputation?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your job?
- Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?

In some places of the world, these consequences are reality. But notice the questions are phrased, "Are you willing?" Following Jesus doesn't necessarily mean all these things will happen to you, but are you willing take up your cross? If there comes a point in your life where you are faced with a choice—Jesus or the comforts of this life—which will you choose?

Commitment to Christ means taking up your cross daily, giving up your hopes, dreams, possessions, even your very life if need be for the cause of Christ. Only if you willingly take up your cross may you be called His disciple (Luke 14:27). The reward is worth the price. Jesus followed His call of death to self ("Take up your cross and follow Me") with the gift of life in Christ: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25-26).

**Recommended Resource:** [True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus by John Koessler.](#)