
What Does It Mean to "Take Up Your Cross?"

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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*Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)*

We hear the phrase, "Take up your cross and follow me," over and over again in Christianity. "Take up your cross," the Savior said. We nod our heads in agreement, as if we all understand perfectly.

OK. But what does it actually mean to "take up your cross?"

Are we supposed to follow Jesus so literally that we give up our lives, willingly, to the religious and political authorities of our day, who will then put us to death by execution? That's what Jesus did. Are we supposed to carry an instrument of torture on our backs to the place of our suffering? Again, that's what Jesus did. After all, the cross was not just a piece of nice jewelry back in those days; it had about the same cultural connotation as an electric chair might in our own time. It was a form of degrading execution.

What was Jesus doing, then, during his last days, that we might be called to follow? One way to consider "the cross" is as a sign of weakness. When Jesus took up his cross, he was acknowledging vulnerability. He was admitting weakness, submitting to power that would take away his life. The cross, for Jesus, represented his exposure to pain and suffering. The cross was his vulnerability.

If so, I suggest that "taking up our cross" means picking up and acknowledging our vulnerability. Most of us spend our lives doing just the opposite. We prepare to go out into the world by building up our strengths. We train and go to school and make money and surround ourselves with good company. We even do good and great things in the world with the strengths that we have worked at.

To "take up our cross," however, means to lay our strengths aside. It means to lay our "ego strength" aside. Taking up our cross means, instead, picking up those weaknesses that we so often try to run away from in life. Taking up our cross means carrying around those places where we are vulnerable, places where we are maybe even exposed to embarrassment and shame.

Those are not comfortable places, are they? They are places where we hurt. They are places where we would rather not go. They are places where we would rather not be seen. Still, they are places that are a part of us. Our weaknesses and losses are just as much a part of us as our strengths are.

"Taking up our cross," means, then, coming to terms again with the vulnerable and weaker parts of ourselves, knowing our embarrassing features, acknowledging those places that hurt us. Both our strengths and our weaknesses are part of us; but Jesus calls us to deny "our selves""our ego power""and to carry around our weakness.

Actually something quite powerful occurs when we do this. Jesus said it like this: "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." (Mark 8:35).

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