

Take Up Your Cross

By Scott Moller

“Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”

Luke 9:23 (NIV)

Long before Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, He was instructing His disciples about the cross. He kept telling them that in order to be His disciples they needed to take up their own cross and follow Him. This must have sounded so strange to the disciples. They must have questioned, “How can this be?” or “What does He mean?” They were all familiar with the cross, as it was a common form of public execution by the Romans. The cross was greatly despised and hated by the Jews. It was a symbol of their humiliating subjection to the Romans.

The disciples knew the meaning of the cross. It meant death. They had probably seen men sentenced to death carrying their own cross through the streets on their way to the execution site. To carry one’s cross was a one-way trip. These men would not be returning. As far as the disciples were concerned, the cross was to be feared. Yet Jesus claimed it was a requirement to be His follower. How confusing this must have been for the disciples.

Of course, Jesus knew what lay ahead. He knew that He was on a direct path to His own cross. He knew the disciples would later better understand His meaning in hindsight. He would be their example. One representation of the cross would be Surrender to God, as we see in Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39b (NIV): *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* Jesus desired with all His being to avoid the cross, but He surrendered His will to the will of the Father. He obediently went to the Cross of Calvary against His human will.

We too are symbolically called by Jesus to daily take up our crosses and surrender our will to the Father. Like Jesus, our own will cries out emphatically “NO” to the call. Our own will wants its way. It desires to be a god unto itself. But Jesus again sets the example by how He trusted the Father. The key to victory over our will is trust and faith in the Father. We need to come to an understanding and acceptance that He knows what is best for us.

Jesus continues in Luke 9:24 (NIV), *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”* When Jesus calls us to take up our cross, He is calling us to give up our lives (our will) for Him. It is seemingly a call for the greatest sacrifice. Most consider this price too high, so they do not accept the call of Jesus. They think they are saving their lives for themselves. But in doing so Jesus warns that they will lose eternal life. In regards to our flesh, the cost of following Jesus is high. In regards to God’s rewards, the cost is nothing.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” – Jim Elliot