

**Read: Mark 8:27-35**

## Take Up Your Cross

### **Mark 8:34-35**

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Do you have a favorite sports team? Is it a professional team near where you live? Maybe a college team? Is it a team that has your favorite player? Or maybe you like individual athletes like the famous Olympic gymnast Simone Biles?

All of these athletes have something in common. They all want to be great, and they want to win. Whether that's a gold medal or a tournament or a championship—they all want to achieve their greatest goals.

Could you imagine if your favorite team never practiced? What if they showed up at the game and didn't prepare or learn any plays? Could you imagine if your favorite athlete sat on the couch eating Doritos and watching Netflix all day? That would be crazy! Everyone knows that it takes hard work and effort to reach your goals. The hard work may be difficult, but the end result is totally worth it.

Following Jesus is very much the same. It takes hard work and effort! Not in the being saved and going to heaven part. That's easy. Jesus took care of that by paying for our sins and giving us heaven by his loving grace. However, on the journey of life to heaven, it can be very difficult!

Peter was very confused about this once. He had just spoken some amazing words of faith, confessing that Jesus is the Savior and the Son of God. But as soon as Jesus talked about suffering and dying, Peter tried to stop Jesus because he only wanted easy and nice things. So Jesus told Peter he was wrong because he had in mind earthly things and not heavenly things.

Then Jesus spoke the words you just heard. Jesus said that whoever follows him must, "deny themselves and take up their cross." What Jesus means is that just as he suffered, so will we. Part of living in a sinful world is the hard work of putting God first in our hearts and putting sin behind us. It also means that sometimes people won't like us because we are Christians, just like they didn't like Jesus.

But not to worry! Jesus will give us strength to do these difficult things, or to carry these crosses as he said. And even better, the end goal is totally worth it! As Jesus helps us walk through this difficult life, one day soon we will win the ultimate championship because of him—life in heaven! What a victory is ours in Jesus!

*The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.*

### **Questions for the Younger Children**

- Name two things that are really hard in life.
- Explain why going to heaven is easy and not difficult.

### **Questions for Elementary Age Children**

- What does Jesus mean when he says that we should “deny ourselves”?
- Name a temptation in the world that is especially difficult to deny and resist these days.

### **Questions for Middle School and Above**

- Agree/Disagree: If God loved us more, he wouldn’t allow us to suffer so much. Explain your answer.
- Agree/Disagree: Suffering in this life is something to be thankful for. Explain your answer.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Dear Jesus, when life is difficult and challenging, give us strength to endure it and patience to wait for your gift of eternal life. Amen.

### **Hymn: CW 465:1 – Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken**

Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow you.  
Destitute, despised, forsaken, You on earth once suffered, too.  
Perish ev’ry fond ambition, All I’ve ever hoped or known;  
Yet how rich is my condition! God and heav’n are still my own.