

Read: Matthew 16:21-26

Take Up Your Cross

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "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 will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

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

"Candace! How could you? What did I tell you?" Candace had a very sad and sorry look on her face. She clearly had disappointed her mother. They were just about to eat dinner, but Candace wasn't hungry at all. She had crumbs all over her shirt, chocolate all over her face, and a belly all full of . . . chocolate chip cookies.

They looked so delicious, so warm and fresh and ooey-goey, sitting there on the countertop. But her mom had told Candace three separate times, "Candace, no cookies before supper. No treats yet. You have to control yourself."

But she didn't, and because Candace couldn't control herself, she had now missed out on the important part of the meal before the treat at the end. Now Candace had a sick feeling in her stomach for two reasons—too much sugar, and even worse, she had disobeyed her mother.

It's really easy for us to think about life the way Candace did about dinner. Wouldn't it be nice to do whatever you want? Wouldn't be nice to have all the fun you want, no matter the consequences? And wouldn't it be nice if we could just skip all the problems of this life and have the glory of heaven right now, kind of like skipping dinner and only eating cookies?

Peter thought that way in the Bible once, too. Jesus told him how he was going to suffer and die for all people, but Peter tried to stop him. He only wanted the good times with Jesus. He only wanted the glory of Jesus. He didn't want to think about suffering. Peter was kind of like Candace, who only wanted to think about chocolate chip cookies.

That's when Jesus spoke the words we heard for today's devotion: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." What Jesus means is that his followers need to learn to spiritually control themselves. We need to learn to put Jesus first, before our sinful desires, before our friends, and before anything else. That's so hard to do! Good thing Jesus came to this world and put us first when he died for us on the cross to bring us forgiveness! Now with a new life in Jesus, his love for us and his strength can help us learn

to control ourselves and make good and God-pleasing choices. Be patient, friends! After a short time of taking up our cross in this life, the sweetest dessert is yet to come—better than cookies—eternal life in heaven!

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 Younger Children

- What sin is hard for you to stop doing?
- Why did Jesus have to go and suffer and die?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Explain what Jesus means when he says we should “deny ourselves.” Can you give an example?
- What are ways that we can work on becoming stronger to resist temptations and sins?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Which do you think is more difficult about following Jesus—facing persecution and enemies, or denying yourself and facing personal temptations and sins? Why?
- Explain what Jesus meant when he said this: What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, sometimes it is very hard to control ourselves and keep away from sin. Give us strength to deny our own desires and put you first. 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.