

Take Up Your Cross

Romans 15:4, "Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. They give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises."

Our teacher Jesus is always with us through his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Jesus says I will never leave you nor forsake you. Yes, God's Presence, namely the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ is always with us. The Holy Spirit is our constant instructor and encourager. We have a teacher that is with us always, tutoring us, giving us guidance, giving us wisdom, giving us help from above and it is God the Holy Spirit.

The primary teaching tool of God is the Bible. It takes having the Holy Spirit living inside of you for you to understand the Word of God. **1. God breathes into us a living hope and encouragement as the Holy Spirit instructs us through the Word.** In other words, we experience the Presence of God through His Word. God even helps us to wait patiently when all our circumstances seem absolutely impossible. Romans 15:4, "Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. They give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises."

Please hear the Word of God through Paul, **2. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right.**

3. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

God has something to say to all of us today as we look at one of the most significant teachings that Jesus ever gave. These words are straight from God for it was God who spoke them.

On this rally day weekend, we are looking at some of the most difficult to understand words that comes out of the mouth of Jesus.

These are so difficult that I want us to stop and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray. Dear Lord Jesus, please instruct us what you meant by what you said in these verses. Without your help, we cannot understand. But with the help of the Holy Spirit we can understand your words and apply them to our lives. May any resistance we have toward the Holy Spirit be broken down and dissolved and may your teaching come to us with power, authority, clarity, and compassion. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

In Luke chapter 14 Jesus is on a one way road and he wants all of his followers to get on the same one way road with him. The one way road is to the cross. I sense in Jesus words a huge sense of urgency.

He was surrounded by a large crowd as his popularity was increasing. Jesus addresses the crowd with words they would not forget. There are times that the only way to get through to a crowd is to be absolutely blunt. Jesus say's, *If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

If you believe the Bible to be the true Word of God, and it is, and if you believe that whatever Jesus says is absolute truth, and it is, what in the world is Jesus saying? I thought Jesus told us to love each other even as He loves us. I thought Jesus told us to love even our enemies. Is Jesus contradicting himself? What in the world is Jesus saying.

A person might read this and think, "I have hated my brother and sister my whole life." "It looks like I am following the words of Jesus."

Please pay attention to the meaning of these words. The Bible often interprets itself for us in other passages. Martin Luther penned the phrase, "Scripture interprets Scripture." In the parallel passage, where Jesus says basically the same thing in Matthew we find Jesus' words

much easier to understand. Matthew 10:37 **4. If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.**

So when Jesus tells us to hate the members of our family, the term hate is a comparative term. Jesus is bluntly telling us that He wants us to love Him above all. Jesus wants to be supreme in our lives. **5. Jesus wants us to place our relationship with Him at the top of all our relationships.** Jesus wants us to pour our greatest amount of love and effort into our relationship with him.

Your most significant relationship is with Jesus Christ. The most important relationship you have is with the Lord. The relationship that God asks for you to spend the most time and effort is with Jesus. Jesus asks for your supreme loyalty. Jesus is supreme. There is no one higher than Jesus and He is asking to be your highest and most cherished and most important relationship. Put your greatest intensity into your relationship with Jesus and following him. This is the meaning of Jesus' words.

We are all relational beings. We get hurt easily by our spouses, by our brothers and sisters, by our parents. All of us have been deeply wounded by these human relationships. I hear in Jesus words that if we put Him first, if we love him first, if we cherish him the most, something very good will happen. Our human relationships may not be all that we want them to be but the Lord Jesus Christ has all that we truly need. Put Jesus first and the Lord has his ways of helping us in all our other relationships. But if we put our other relationships first, and Jesus second or third, well, Jesus will not settle for being number 2 or 3 or 10. He is Lord. It is dangerous indeed to love our spouses and children more than we love Jesus. On the other hand, out of love for Jesus, we love one another the same way that Jesus loves us.

Jesus continues bluntly, **6. "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."**

Lest we forget, Jesus was on a one-way road to the cross. There was no turning back. There was no turning to the right or to the left. He was on the obedient path. In the days of crucifixions, those about to be crucified carried the horizontal cross beam to the place of crucifixion. Jesus knew that one day in the not to distant future, he would have to pick up that cross beam and carry it to his execution, his humiliation and sacrificial death. More than likely he would carry it on his shoulders.

As Christians, we too have a cross to carry. **7. We have God given responsibilities to pick up, carry out, and fulfill.** And our primary responsibility is to follow Jesus wherever that might be even if it costs one's life. Take up your cross, shoulder your God given responsibilities. None of us here may lose our lives for following Jesus. But there is another meaning. To take up the cross beam is to yield your entire life to Jesus. **8. It is to die your own sinful selfish ways and walk a holy life. It is the resurrection side of the cross that enables us to do just that.**

On this rally day weekend, I hear God telling all of us that He loves us with an everlasting love and underneath are the everlasting arms. I hear Jesus telling us that he is a jealous God and will not settle for being anything but number one in our lives. To put any of our human relationships above Christ is the sin of idolatry. We cannot let people take the place of God in our lives. On this rally day weekend I hear Jesus telling parents to shoulder their responsibility, to take up their cross and bring their children to Sunday school and worship. It is what Jesus is asking of you. Your children are a gift from the Lord and they cannot come unless you bring them. Eternal life is at stake.

Jesus says, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Jesus loves the little children. We drop the cross or fail to pick it up when we keep our children at home during worship and Sunday school. Jesus says, "Knock that off and pick up the cross and shoulder your God given responsibility to raise your

children in the Christian faith in the Christian church. This is the good word for the day. Amen
and Amen.