

Devotion 23: Take Up Your Cross and Follow

March 20, 2026

Scripture: Matthew 16:24

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

Devotion

Peter thought he knew where Jesus should go. When Jesus told His disciples He would suffer, die, and rise again, Peter pulled Him aside and said, essentially, "That's not the plan, Lord. That can't be right." And in one of the most startling moments in all of Scripture, Jesus turned to Peter — one of His closest friends — and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Peter was a well-meaning blind guide. He wanted to protect Jesus from pain. But he didn't understand that the path through suffering was the very road God had planned. Jesus didn't come to avoid the cross. He came to walk it — and to invite us to walk it with Him.

"Take up your cross and follow me" doesn't mean look for suffering to pile onto yourself. It means: Stop trying to re-route around every hard thing. Stop designing a comfortable life that never costs you anything. The guide who leads us to life first leads us through death — the death of our own pride, our own agendas, our own will. When we follow Jesus, we follow someone who is leading us somewhere better than anything we would have chosen for ourselves. The cross is not the end of the road. It is the door through which resurrection life comes.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Peter reacted the way he did when Jesus talked about suffering? Have you ever tried to re-route around something hard God was asking you to do?
2. What is one "cross" in your life right now — something that costs you, requires sacrifice, or isn't the road you would have chosen?
3. How does knowing that Jesus leads us through the cross — not away from it — change how you think about hard things?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the times we have tried to lead You instead of follow You. Give us the courage to take up our crosses — to deny ourselves, to serve others, to walk through hard things with You. We trust that the road You lead goes to life. Amen.

Family Action Item: Write on a small piece of paper one thing you need to "die to" this week — a selfish habit, a grudge, a worry you keep trying to carry yourself. Pray over it together and then tear it up as a symbol of giving it to Jesus.