

# Take Up Our Cross

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Taking upon yourselves your crosses and following the Savior means continuing with faith on the Lord's path and not indulging in worldly habits.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have received wonderful teachings from our leaders during these last two days. I testify to you that if we strive to apply these inspired and timely teachings in our lives, the Lord, through His grace, will help each of us carry our cross and make our burdens light.<sup>1</sup>

While in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, the Savior revealed to His disciples what He would suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes in Jerusalem. He specifically taught them about His death and glorious Resurrection.<sup>2</sup> At that point in time, His disciples did not completely understand His divine mission on earth. Peter himself, when he heard what the Savior had said, took Him aside and rebuked Him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."<sup>3</sup>

To help His disciples to understand that devotion to His work includes submission and suffering, the Savior emphatically declared:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>4</sup>

Through this declaration, the Savior emphasized that all those who are willing to follow Him need to deny themselves and control their desires, appetites, and passions, sacrificing everything, even life itself if necessary, being entirely submissive to the will of the Father—just as He did.<sup>5</sup> This is, in fact, the price to be paid for the salvation of a soul. Jesus purposely and metaphorically used the symbol of a cross to help His disciples better understand what sacrifice and devotion to the Lord's cause would truly mean. The image of a cross was well known among His disciples and the inhabitants of the Roman Empire because Romans forced victims of crucifixion to publicly carry their own cross or crossbeam to the place where their execution would occur.<sup>6</sup>

It was only after the Savior's Resurrection that the disciples' minds were opened to understand all that had been written about Him<sup>7</sup> and what would be required of them from that time on.<sup>8</sup>

In the same fashion, all of us, brothers and sisters, need to open our minds and our hearts in order to more fully understand the relevance of taking upon ourselves our crosses and following Him. We learn through the scriptures that those who wish to take their cross upon themselves love Jesus Christ in such a way that they deny themselves of all ungodliness and of every worldly lust and keep His commandments.<sup>9</sup>

Our determination to cast off all that is contrary to God's will and to sacrifice all we are asked to give and to strive to follow His teachings will help us to endure in the path of Jesus Christ's gospel—even in the face of tribulation, the weakness of our souls, or the social pressure and worldly philosophies that oppose His teachings.

For example, for those who have not yet found an eternal companion and may be feeling lonely and hopeless, or for those who have been divorced and feel abandoned and forgotten, I assure you that accepting the Savior's invitation of taking upon yourselves your crosses and following Him means continuing with faith on the Lord's path, maintaining a pattern of dignity, and not indulging in worldly habits that will eventually take away our hope in God's love and mercy.

The same principles apply to those of you who are experiencing same-gender attraction and feel discouraged and helpless. And maybe for this reason some of you are feeling that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not for you anymore. If that is the case, I want to assure you that there is always hope in God the Father and in His plan of happiness, in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice, and in living Their loving commandments. In His perfect wisdom, power, justice, and mercy, the Lord may seal us His, that we may be brought to His presence and have everlasting salvation, if we are steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments<sup>10</sup> and are always abounding in good works.<sup>11</sup>

To those who have committed serious sins, accepting this same invitation means, among other things, to humble yourself before God, to counsel with appropriate Church leaders, and to repent and forsake your sins. This process will also bless all who are fighting against debilitating addictions, including opioids, drugs, alcohol, and pornography. Taking these steps brings you closer to the Savior, who can ultimately free you from guilt, sorrow, and spiritual and physical slavery. Additionally, you may also desire to seek the support of your family, friends, and competent medical and counseling professionals.

Please never give up after subsequent failures and consider yourself incapable of abandoning sins and overcoming addiction. You cannot afford to stop trying and thereafter continue in weakness and sin! Always strive to do your best, manifesting through your works the desire to cleanse the inner vessel, as taught by the Savior.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes solutions to certain challenges come after months and months of continuous effort. The promise found in the Book of Mormon that "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do,"<sup>13</sup> is applicable in these circumstances. Please remember that the Savior's gift of grace "is not necessarily limited in time to 'after'

all we can do. We may receive His grace before, during, and after the time when we expend our own efforts.”<sup>14</sup>

I testify that as we continually strive to overcome our challenges, God will bless us with the gifts of faith to be healed and of the working of miracles.<sup>15</sup> He will do for us what we are not capable of doing for ourselves.

Additionally, for those who feel bitter, angry, offended, or chained to sorrows for something you feel is undeserved, to take up one’s cross and follow the Savior means to strive to lay aside these feelings and turn to the Lord so He can free us from this state of mind and help us to find peace. Unfortunately, if we hold on to these negative feelings and emotions, we may find ourselves living without the influence of the Lord’s Spirit in our lives. We cannot repent *for* other people, but we can forgive them—by refusing to be held hostages by those who have harmed us.<sup>16</sup>

The scriptures teach that there is a way out of these situations—by inviting our Savior to help us to replace our stony hearts with new hearts.<sup>17</sup> For this to happen, we need to come before the Lord with our weaknesses<sup>18</sup> and implore His help and forgiveness,<sup>19</sup> especially during the sacred moment when we partake of the sacrament each Sunday. May we choose to seek His help and take an important and difficult step by forgiving those who have hurt us so that our wounds may begin to heal. I promise you that in your doing so, your nights will be full of the relief that comes from a mind at peace with the Lord.

While in Liberty Jail in 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote an epistle to Church members containing prophecies that are so very applicable in all these circumstances and situations. He wrote, “All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, those who have taken upon themselves the name of the Savior, trusting in His promises and persevering to the end, will be saved<sup>21</sup> and may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.<sup>22</sup>

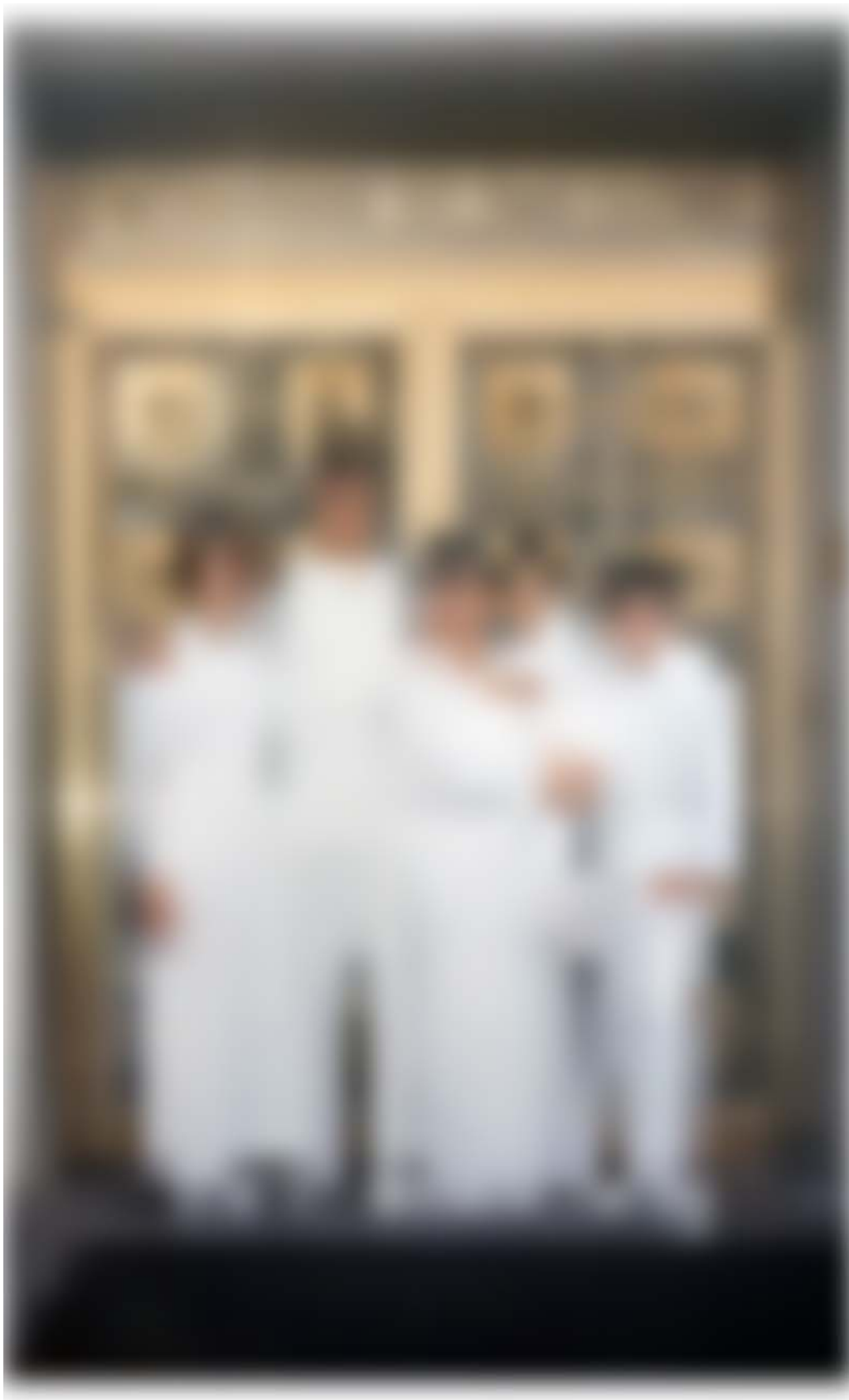
We all face adverse circumstances in our lives that make us feel sad, helpless, hopeless, and sometimes even weakened. Some of these feelings may lead us to question the Lord: “Why am I experiencing these situations?” or “Why are my expectations not met? After all, I am doing everything in my power to carry my cross and follow the Savior!”

My dear friends, we must remember that taking our cross upon ourselves includes being humble and trusting in God and in His infinite wisdom. We must acknowledge that He is aware of each of us and of our needs. It is also necessary to accept the fact that the Lord’s timing is different than ours. Sometimes we seek for a blessing and set a time limit for the Lord to fulfill it. We cannot condition our faithfulness to Him by imposing upon Him a deadline for the answers to our desires. When we do this, we resemble the skeptical Nephites from ancient times, who mocked their brothers and sisters by saying that the time was past for the fulfillment of the words spoken by Samuel the Lamanite, creating confusion among

those who believed.<sup>23</sup> We need to trust the Lord enough to be still and know that He is God, that He knows all things, and that He is aware of each of us.<sup>24</sup>



I recently had the opportunity to minister to a widowed sister named Franca Calamassi, who is suffering from a debilitating illness. Sister Calamassi was the first member of her family to join the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Although her husband was never baptized, he consented to meet with the missionaries and often attended Church meetings. Despite these circumstances, Sister Calamassi remained faithful and raised her four children in the gospel of Jesus Christ. A year following her husband's passing, Sister Calamassi took her children to the temple, and they participated in sacred ordinances and were sealed together as a family. The promises associated with these ordinances brought her much hope, joy, and happiness that helped her carry on in life.



When the first symptoms of the disease began to appear, her bishop gave her a blessing. At that time she told her bishop that she was ready to accept the Lord's will, expressing her faith to be healed as well as her faith to endure her illness to the end.

During my visit, while holding Sister Calamassi's hand and looking into her eyes, I saw an angelic glow emanating from her countenance—reflecting her confidence in God's plan and her perfect brightness of hope in the Father's love and plan for her.<sup>25</sup> I felt her firm determination to endure in her faith until the end by taking up her cross, despite the challenges she was facing. This sister's life is a testimony of Christ, a statement of her faith and devotion to Him.

Brothers and sisters, I want to testify to you that taking upon us our cross and following the Savior requires us to follow His example and strive to become like Him,<sup>26</sup> patiently facing the circumstances of life, denying and despising the appetites of the natural man, and waiting on the Lord. The Psalmist wrote:

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”<sup>27</sup>

“He is our help and our shield.”<sup>28</sup>

I testify to you that following our Master's footsteps and waiting on Him who is the ultimate healer of our lives will provide rest to our souls and make our burdens easy and light.<sup>29</sup> Of these things I testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.