

Think of the most recent time something came up in your life that you knew you needed to do, it was the right thing to do, but it wasn't going to be pleasant or popular. It might have even cost you a friend, alienated a family member, caused turbulence at work or was just a very uncomfortable and difficult thing for you to do. Did you do what you believe you needed to and should do? Did you do something less than what you believed you should do? Did you decide to do nothing and just hope the whole thing would take care of itself? What was it like coming to the decision to do whatever you did - or didn't do?

Taking up one's cross or accepting hardships for the sake of doing God's will was a thing long before Jesus ever came along. The story of Jeremiah the Prophet is a perfect example of this, as are the lives of many of the prophets of the Old Testament. Today we have Jeremiah complaining to God about how his role as prophet has made him an outcast and a laughing stock. Jeremiah has even tried to quit but he is just too solidly rooted in God, and so the need to do God's will compels him, prodding from the inside until he can no longer hold it back. He must do what the Lord God requires of him. He is forced to take up this cross and do what he knows needs to be done.

For some of us, talking over the difficult things we know we must do with the Lord has become as natural as breathing. We might even let God know how little we like doing them as Jeremiah did, but in the end, we will do what we know needs to be done. We do them because we belong to God first. If he asks us to shoulder a cross, we shoulder a cross.

For some of us, that cross we've been asked to pick up may sit there for a while. We look at it from every angle and see if there isn't some way we can reduce its weight or find a good reason why we really shouldn't be the one to carry it. But in the end, we will pick it up and do what needs to be done. Maybe not with the most willing of spirits. Maybe grumbling about it. But we will do it. We know it's the right thing to do and more than likely, if we don't, no one else will.

For some of us, we may give it a try. Yes, we can see that it is the best thing to do, but then when we try, it's much harder than we thought. It takes more time and effort and we have other things we'd rather be doing. We may become frightened by the demands the cross is making on us and the changes we can see it threatens to bring about in us and our lives. It was a good idea in the beginning, but I just can do this anymore. And we put that cross down.

Some would like to pick up the cross, but something about it scares them away from even trying. Even the attempt seems awkward. I don't want to try and fail. None of my friends or colleagues seem to be trying. And we could spend all day listing the other several hundred excuses there are for not ever making the attempt. But maybe next time we will.

And then there are those who just can't be bothered. It's all nonsense. Let someone else waste their time on such a foolish effort. That sort of thing is beneath them. There is at least a slight opening of the door a little bit of desire that Jesus can work with in all cases except for this last one.

Taking up one's cross isn't about getting it perfect and saving the world. That's already happened. All Jesus wants from us is an effort, and opening that he can work with, and he and his spirit living within us will do the rest. Probably not as quick as we would like, and certainly not as fast and flashy as the naysayers seem to want. For most of us there will be messy stories and fits and starts along the way. That's kind of normal and only human. Taking up one's cross comes down to this: little by little, in many struggles and failures, with Jesus helping us all the way, we haul that cross to the top of Calvary Hill where it will be transformed into our resurrection, our glory.