

Question #1:

*The cross evokes impassioned emotions in many Christians. It is so significant that many people display this powerful symbol on their person and in their homes. In Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; the gospels say, "Take up your cross and follow me."*

*What do you think Jesus means by this statement? How can you take up your cross in your daily life? How can you help others do the same? Share some examples of how you may have already done so.*

The cross to me is the universal symbol of sacrifice, hardship, and struggle. God so loved us that He sent us His only Son, only to have Him sacrifice Himself in order that we might be able to have everlasting life with the Holy Trinity. The hardship and struggle that Jesus went through was immense. The crosses we face in our life may not be as extreme as Jesus had to endure, but as Jesus instructed, we must take up our own cross and follow Him. Once we do this we can live freely and deeply with God and His Holy Son and take comfort in knowing that they will be there to help us with our crosses. Sacrifice represents itself in many different ways. As a teenager ready to graduate high school I have had to make lots of sacrifices. One of those sacrifices included skipping the cool party to finish a project or not going over a friend's house in order to get some extra studying in. I am glad I made those sacrifices, though, because in the long run it paid off to work hard at my school work. During each year, however, there would be a class that I had to make more sacrifices than normal; the work did not come easily to me, but I took up the cross anyway. I knew that when I struggled with something in school, Jesus would help me through. I knew that no matter what the situation, or cross—whether it was at school or at home—Jesus would not be far and I would follow and keep the faith in Him.

Throughout my lifetime I have seen many other people have to bear a cross that took a huge toll on their life. I have seen friends lose a parent and grandparent to cancer, friends and family members have to struggle through deep poverty, and a friend lose a house from a bad storm. All of these horrific ordeals are crosses that life throws at us. It may feel like God is against you, but God is really trying to see if you will follow him in faith through the tough time. Although it may be hard to see the bright side of a cross, or hardship, we need to place our faith in God because He always takes care of us, time and time again. It was hard to listen to a friend cry when the grandmother she loved passed on, but I just kept telling her that Jesus was with her, and that with time He would take her sorrow away. I was there with her as she tried her best to get through the hardship. I made sure that I prayed for her and her family and made myself available if she needed anything. Everyone goes through different crosses in life, but they share similar qualities. They are tough times—not meant to be fun or easy to deal with. With faith in God and believing that Jesus will help us, these situations can go a little more smoother. No matter what the hardship, struggle, or sacrifice, Jesus is willing to help us with this cross, and by following Him, we will become much stronger.