



Give Up, Take Up, Keep Up

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Pokagon, MI: A few quiet streets, a gas station, a small grocery store, a volunteer fire company and a church. Pokagon isn't anything for people to come and see, but a scattered few manage to find the town in order to see the church. You may go around the block and not notice the church. But you can see the old dilapidated building, covered and shrouded by vines and trees, appearing like an unpainted, unused barn; but it's the church. Things like the broken floor, falling plaster, the missing pews, and bales of hay do little to dampen one's enthusiasm, for here it was in 1913 that America's favorite hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross," was played and sung for the first time. To one side of the property is a large, hand-hewn, wooden cross—a fitting tribute to what inspired that song. The cross of Christ is a promise to every believer. He took the instrument of torture reserved for slaves and outcasts of society and transformed it into a way of freedom and acceptance into the family of God. From that which was intended to cause agony and shame, Jesus creates a reason for great rejoicing. He took the dreaded cross of final defeat and made it the glorious cross of ultimate victory. What Jesus did on Calvary is His pledge that He can do the same for you. You may be rejected, despised, lifeless— but when Jesus touches you with His power, your life is transformed. He tells us how this process works in Mark 8: 34-38. Here are the three steps of discipleship (vs 34.) To become a disciple simply means that you allow Christ to work His miracles in your life.

1.) The First step of discipleship is to "**DENY SELF**"(through the power of the indwelling Christ). Let the person deny what self demands - deny living a self-centered life. There must be a shift in the person's center of gravity from a concern for self to a concern for the cause of Christ. You're willing to say "No"

to oneself in order to say “Yes” to God. Self-worship has always been a popular religion. Today the mass media bombards us with encouragement to gratify self-to look out for number one– to get our priorities “out of order.”

Abraham and Lot stood on the hillside together– one saw a city whose Builder and Maker is God – the other saw the cities of the plain. People today see what Lot saw then – the apparently green grasses of materialism, pleasure, advancement. But if it requires that you pitch your tent closer to Sodom, then it isn’t worth it. Everything from secular selfishness, to religious self-righteousness is not the way to find or realize happiness. If you live selfishly, trying to gain pleasure and happiness for yourself, you commit your life to failure – to spiritual suicide. “It is in giving that we receive.” You cannot live for self and live for Christ. To live to self means that you will experience eternal death. To live for Christ is your guarantee of eternal life.

2.) The Second step of discipleship is to **“TAKE UP YOUR CROSS”**. The second step of discipleship is that after you deny self, Jesus says, “Take up your cross.” He doesn’t take a cross, place it upon you and make you bear it. He doesn’t force a cross on you. The cross is laid before you and you are bidden to take it up. He makes it a test of your will - you decide. God has a “volunteer” army - you have to enlist. Well, what exactly is your cross? It’s not arthritis – not a physical or emotional thorn in your flesh. The cross is “Christ and Him Crucified.” You are to be crucified with Jesus, as Paul states in **Galatians 2: 20**, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It means that you must be personally identified with Christ as your Saviour and your Master. Jesus is letting us know that we need to be prepared to make sacrifices. We must be willing to accept the responsibilities of discipleship. Since the “servant is not greater than His Lord,” we need to be ready to give the supreme sacrifice. There is no crown without a cross. Because Jesus “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name” (**Philippians 2 : 8,9**). “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake”(Philippians 1: 29). In so doing you understand better the tremendously infinite humiliation of Christ. Suffering with Christ, and for Christ, is not only a great privilege, it is apparently a condition for glorification with Him. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (**Romans 8: 16-18**). When the Gospel writer, Luke, quotes Jesus here (**Luke 9:23**), the text says we must take up our cross “daily” - just as we are to “die daily” to self. Every day we are to set aside our own interests and desires and accept voluntarily and wholeheartedly the cause of Christ. You will then be able to say, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things...that I may win Christ” (**Philippians 3:8**).

3.) The Third step, Jesus says, is to **“FOLLOW ME”** The verse ends with the third step of discipleship – “Follow Me.” Give Up, Take Up, Keep Up. The title of the sermon today; Give up a self centered life – take up the cross of Christ – and now keep up with Him wherever He leads. This means that you follow Him, not part of the way, but all the way – not some of what He teaches, but all He teaches. It may mean a change in recreation or habits or lifestyle. To follow Jesus means that you pattern your life after His life. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps, who did no sin....” (**1 Peter 2: 21,22**). We are “to walk even as He

walked: in ministry of love to those who are hurting – in works of compassion to the disadvantaged – in witness to the truth – in obedience to the will of God. When you follow someone, two things are certain – the other person is traveling before you, and you are going where they have gone. Jesus has gone before to show you the way. May you not run ahead or lag behind or get sidetracked, for it's so easy to get lost in this world. The devil will set up roadblocks of doubt, hurdles of trials, detours of scenic overlooks. You need to stay close to Jesus. If He leads you into rich pastures of truth, go there. If He leads you into the waters of baptism – go with Him there. If He leads you into the fiery furnace of self-sacrifice and persecution – go with Him there. Are people today interested in crosses? Yes, some are. But because of the devil's falsehoods in the disguise of modern philosophies and trends, people prefer crosses to fit into their own way of thinking – what they think crosses should be like. And thus rather than taking up the cross of Christ, imitations of the authentic have been made and are popular. People use the excuse that they are trying to be relevant. "We live in a different day than the apostles," they say. "This is the 21st century." And by their lifestyle and actions – by the way they spend their time, energy and money – they're making a statement about the importance of Christ and His cross. Let me illustrate: "Imagine with me, say a neighbor of yours, in search of a cross. Typically he doesn't know where to start, and it's been a while since he's seen anyone else who had one, so he opens the Yellow Pages of his phone directory – "Cars, Cemeteries, Churches, Crosses." He makes his way to the unfamiliar store.

"There's one in the window. Of course, I don't want to sell myself on the first one I see." He goes in. "It looks a bit rough and heavy. Oh, it's on sale – probably trying to get rid of it. Here's a tag – The Old Rugged Cross - I believe that, it does look old." "Ah, here's one: nice rounded pine poles, sanded smooth, no splinters like that first one. Not a bad price either. That one hanging sure gets the attention, but, it isn't my style, too fancy. This must be a custom shop. They have all sorts of different materials, sizes, designs, and colors of crosses. Should be something I can find. Here comes a salesman." May I help you, sir? "Just looking around." "See any you like?" "Well, I don't know. I guess if I were to choose, it would probably be between these three, maybe." "Then allow me to give you a brief overview of the advantages of each." **LIGHTWEIGHT MODEL:** It's of average size — other people will be able to see that you are concerned about crosses, and it's contemporary with the times – streamlined for efficiency. You hardly will know that you're carrying a cross, it's so light. It won't slow you down like a heavy one, so you can easily keep pace with your neighbors. **COMPACT SIZE:** This would be convenient – you could wear it instead of being concerned about dropping one that you carry. And, if it gets in the way, or looks like the cross may get damaged by what you're doing at the moment, its size enables you to quickly and easily take it off and put it in your pocket or purse. It's good for business men and women, anybody who has to deal with a lot of different people. The next best thing to a disposable. **DELUXE PADDED CROSS:** People will notice, right away, the royal, classy, rich looking cover of your cross. You will, because of its solid wood core, be able to actually feel the burden of a cross yet, the two-inch foam cushioning will keep the cross from hurting at all. Picture it in your living room as a conversation piece. You wouldn't carry it all the time – maybe once a week to church, otherwise the cloth will become soiled. In summary then: Lightweight model – won't slow you down. 'Hardly feels like you're carrying a cross. Compact size – easy on or off, depending on the circumstances. Deluxe padded – use it for special occasions. Which one would you like?" "Well, I'm really not sure." "People usually try to decide what they want a cross for, and that helps them pick the right one for their needs." "It's just that the price is a little higher than I was expecting to pay." "Well, that may be true, but remember, you get what you pay for. These are popular models and in good demand – you'll fit in well." "Can I bring it back if I decide I don't want it, and get a full refund?" "No, but, we'll take it in on a trade – we could exchange it." "Maybe, I should wait." "You shouldn't leave here without

a cross.” “It’s a bit much— I’m not really prepared.” “If it’s a bargain you’re looking for, there is one model that we hardly sell anymore, so we won’t be keeping any in stock. You may have seen it in the window. It’s rough and heavy, but it’s a good buy. In fact, right now we’re almost giving it away. It’s selling in exchange for your sin and selfishness. These others will remain at their regular price, in exchange for your soul.” Jesus gives three steps of discipleship – “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” When you become a disciple of Jesus Christ, He gives you three gifts.

1.) The first gift of discipleship is a **BETTER LIFE**. When you face sorrow and grief, He is there to comfort you. He helps you through problems and difficulties. He forgives your sins and dissolves your guilt. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” That He will “open up the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing.” Obtain the riches of Christ and you’ll never miss the poverty of a sinful life.” Realize the potential of experiencing the “more abundant life” of peace and security and joy!

2.) The second gift of discipleship is a **BRIGHTER HOPE**. With all the corruption and pollution in the world and in the hearts of mankind today — you have reason to rejoice, because “Redemption draweth nigh.” Earth is not to be your final resting place — you have hope — the “Blessed Hope” — “Christ in you, the Hope of glory!” Jesus will put an end to sin, suffering, and death. Not only do “all things work together for good to them that love the Lord” (**Romans 8: 28**), but there “awaits for you a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge will give you “on that day.”

3.) The third gift of discipleship is the **BEST REWARD**. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus! If you have Jesus as your Saviour — if you have taken up His cross and are following Him — there awaits for you an eternal happiness filled with the vibrating energy of God’s love. When you give your self to Christ, when you lay all on the altar, when you devote everything you have to the extension of His truth — then you begin to enter into His eternal joy in this life, and in the life to come. Therefore, look “unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher” of your faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross (**Hebrews 12: 20**. In His glory, I want to see the King — and forever let His praises ring; For on Calvary, Jesus died for me — That’s why I want to see the King some day! I want to see the satisfaction on His face when He looks out over the Redeemed and says, “It was worth it all for Me” — to be part of the joy that was set before Him, enabling Him to endure the cross and suffer its shame. Don’t you want to be there — to celebrate at the great Communion — the marriage supper? Imagine the hush as Jesus stands, and we hear Him pronounce a blessing on the food. And all Heaven vibrates when the saints shout “Amen” in perfect unison and harmony. Then Jesus lifts the cup that represents His shed blood — to drink it anew with us in the kingdom — and once again it trembles in His hand. “Oh the wonder of it all — just to think that He loves me!” “I am not worthy, the least of His mercies, yet Jesus left heaven for me!” “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (**Galatians 6: 14**).