

Jesus Teaches About the Cost of Discipleship

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus shared that discipleship involves a clear, total, and costly commitment to following Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35

Despite the growing intolerance of Western society, we still live in a time when, compared to other places in the world, it is incredibly advantageous to be a Christian, at least to a point. Being a member at your local church (even if you only go on special holidays), donating to your favorite Christian charity of choice (as long as it isn't a pro-life charity), and being a generally moral person (as long as your morality doesn't infringe on anyone else's choices) are all things that modern American people claim to love.

But Jesus requires an obedience without parenthetical conditions—a true and radical commitment. He requires obedience when it isn't trendy and even when it costs. Our commitment to Him could cause a loss of livelihood, familial connections, and eventually our lives.



How would you describe the world's impression of disciples of Jesus Christ?

Group Time

Point 1: Being Jesus' disciple requires a clear commitment (Luke 9:57-62).

⁵⁷ As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

⁵⁹ Then he said to another, "Follow me." "Lord," he said, "first let me go bury my father." ⁶⁰ But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house." ⁶² But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Whatever their salvation experience, there was a moment when every believer made a clear, verbal commitment to Christ, saying "I have decided to follow Jesus" in one form or another. But in this passage, Jesus communicates that verbal assent to His lordship is not enough, and He doesn't sugar-coat His expectations of His disciples. He wasn't concerned about amassing lukewarm followers for show. He is concerned with the real, heart-deep commitment of His listeners that will lead to true transformation.



What were some of your expectations of Christian discipleship when you became a believer?

Three men claimed to want to follow Jesus in this passage, but all three had their hang-ups because they had to put Him above all else, including **comfort, duty, wealth,** and **family**. They couldn't choose following Jesus *and* earthly comfort, following Jesus *and* earthly duty or wealth, following Jesus *and* family; it was Jesus *or* everything else. This was not a casual commitment but a life-altering one, and they needed to be completely clear on the terms before signing on the dotted line.

Discipleship is a _____ that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual _____ as people follow Jesus. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole _____, not just the mind.

Point 2: Being Jesus' disciple requires a total commitment (Luke 14:25-27).

²⁵ Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them:

²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

It should be apparent to us that Jesus is using startling words in this passage to drive home an important point: Our allegiance to Jesus must be so complete that it should even surpass our allegiance to our earthly family. In obedience to God's commands, we should strive to love and respect our earthly relations to the best of our ability. Yet our commitment to Jesus should so far outweigh our commitment toward any other person that it would make our love for others look like *hatred* in comparison. This is radical, and that is exactly the point Jesus is making: Our love for Him should be radical.



What are some ways a total commitment to Jesus may be displayed?

We are commanded to love our families, but we are called to love Jesus even more. Scripture also has the expectation that we will love ourselves, yet still we should love Jesus so much that our love for ourselves looks like hatred in comparison. Instead of calling disciples toward self-preservation, Jesus teaches the opposite: we should take up our cross when we follow Him, prepared to follow Him all the way to Calvary. We should come to Christ as if we have already died because our lives belong completely to Him.



Voices from Church History

“The disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.”¹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)

Point 3: Being Jesus' disciple requires a costly commitment (Luke 14:28-35).

²⁸ “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

³⁴ “Now, salt is good, but if salt should lose its taste, how will it be made salty? ³⁵ It isn’t fit for the soil or for the manure pile; they throw it out. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

Through two illustrations—building a tower and going to war—Jesus warned His listeners that following Him is not just a passive decision but an active assessment of everything we’re willing to give up for Him. The cost of following Him is incalculable because **following Him will cost us everything**. If we are not willing to part with the things most precious to us and put Jesus in the place of preeminence, then we need not apply to become His disciples. If we come to the table trying to hedge and negotiate—trying to give just a little less than our all—then we do not belong at the table at all.



What are some ways we may experience the cost of discipleship to Jesus Christ?

In verses 34-35, Jesus told His listeners that His disciples are expected to be the salt of the earth. As we discussed in the previous session, our job as Christians is to act as an agent of preservation in a dying, decaying world. With the message and ministry of the gospel, we seek to arrest the curse of death in individuals and in society. But we can only do so—we can only be effective “salt”—as committed disciples of Jesus Christ who have counted the cost and found following Jesus to be worth the price.



How have you had opportunities to be the salt of the earth for the glory of Jesus in the past week?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Luke 9:57-62

Jesus is not a salesman trying to make a commission, nor is He a modern-day influencer trying to garner as many followers as possible. Actually, in this passage, Jesus seems to be almost trying to *deter* new followers, refusing to sugarcoat the high cost of following Him by painting the bleakest picture possible. He has no desire for fair-weather groupies who chase after earthly fame or worldly glory, so He speaks very clearly about the lack of earthly glory and renown they will know when they are with Him.

Jesus' followers need to know that they will have to give up family ties, home, money, and security, and they won't be able to look back. It is only because of the surpassing goodness of Jesus that we are able to see past the veneer of all that the world offers us and instead look for the satisfaction of an identity firmly rooted in His person and work. There is no cost too high. He is worth it.



When sharing the gospel, how can this passage inform how we communicate with others the cost of following Jesus?

Day 2: Read Luke 14:7-14

Jesus is often depicted as the bridegroom. In this passage, Jesus told the story of a wedding guest who knows not to exalt himself by sitting down in the place of honor without being asked. This would be the equivalent of marching up to the bride's table at an American wedding reception and sitting right next to her mother though the seating chart declared otherwise. Instead, Jesus told His listeners to humble themselves so that they will be exalted. He then encouraged them to *seek* the humble, blessing them through acts of honor and kindness. Jesus turns our traditional understanding of honor and honor-seeking on its head, reminding us that He chose His bride—the church—not because of her beauty and flash but in order to magnify her lack thereof with His own immeasurable worth.

Jesus loves His bride not for what she can give to Him but because of what He can provide for her as a recipient of God's grace.



How can we as the children of God rethink what it means to give honor and to be honored?

Day 3: Read Luke 14:15-24

Here Jesus told another story about a banquet. This time, a king has invited many to partake of an expensive feast, but one by one, the guests give him an excuse and decline the invitation. Upset, the king sends his servant out to invite anyone who will come. Imagine this feast, fit for the wealthiest of society, being enjoyed by the lowliest. Those who should have appreciated the splendor turned it down, leaving those who would truly marvel at the spread to partake of it.

Jesus came to earth offering salvation, a feast that surpasses any worldly sustenance we could imagine. While we'd like to believe that we would see the invitation for what it is, so often we turn Him down in pursuit of the mundane. In this story, He reminded His disciples that His table *will* be filled, and He cautioned them not to let worldly distractions cause them to miss out on being seated at the feast.



How can we ensure that we place Jesus' calling in proper priority in our lives?

Day 4: Read Luke 14:25-27

Crucifixion was a brutal business. Men were tied to a wooden cross and left to suffocate once they tired of holding themselves up for air. This was often after a demoralizing and painful beating, but in Jesus' case, He wasn't tied to the wooden cross but nailed. Criminals in ancient Rome would have to carry their own crosses to the place of execution, buckling under the weight of their own torture devices.

Yet in this passage, Jesus did not shy away from the brutality of what following Him would cost His listeners. He told them that whoever fails to take up his own cross is not a true follower of His.

While we likely won't die on an actual cross, the call to follow Jesus is indeed a call to die. Far before they were martyred, Jesus' disciples were called to die to themselves. They were called to count everything—their family, their money, their status, their cultural capital—as loss in order to move Jesus into His deserved spot as Lord of their lives. This is not glamorous work but gruesome, agonizing, daily dying to our own whims and desires in order to fulfill what Jesus has called us to do.



What are the practical ways that you take up your cross and die to self each day?

Day 5: Read Luke 14:28-35

Following Jesus is not something we are encouraged to do without forethought. Our Savior does not hide the fine print from us but instead invites us to read carefully before we sign on the dotted line. He isn't being secretive about hidden fees; He wants us to know exactly what following Him will cost us. His desire is not to discourage sincere followers from worshiping Him but rather to encourage those sincere followers to know exactly what they're getting into before they start making bold proclamations of allegiance. Jesus wants us to be prepared for the sacrifice that He has called us to.

Following Jesus will cost us *everything*. And if everything is not what we are willing to give, then we are not ready to commit to the calling of being His disciples.



How can we understand exactly what it means to follow Jesus?

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Jesus was born to die—a jarring statement indeed, but one that is quite true.

Christmas and Easter are fused together, linked hand-in-hand in such a way that each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The theology of such a statement is solid but incomplete, for Jesus was not born to die immediately but rather some thirty years later. Jesus' life, then, was not utilitarian—existing just so it could be taken away and picked up again—it had greater meaning and purpose. What Jesus did during those thirty years of walking the earth mattered; He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He satisfied the demands of righteousness that we could not so He might take away our sin when we trust in Him and so His righteousness might be credited to us, making us fully pleasing to the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

In this volume we delve deeper into the marvelous truth of the incarnation to see still further glimpses of Christ's glory on earth. His righteousness did not occur in a vacuum but rather among people, ordinary people like you and me. In each unit of this volume, we will look at Jesus' interactions with people as through a prism, making slight turns to see different yet equally brilliant perspectives of Jesus' works. In Unit 22, we will see Jesus' power to heal coupled with His deep compassion for people, even those who were marginalized in society. In Unit 23, we will see Jesus' riveting teachings empowered by His divine authority. And finally, in Unit 24, we will see Jesus' miraculous power over nature, revealing His identity as Creator God.

Each ray of light we will see points to the same truth: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God given for our salvation. Jesus was indeed born to die, but He lived so that we too might live.

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