

All In

The Everyday Disciple: Following Jesus One Step at a Time Sermon 3

Luke 14:25-33

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²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and 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. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:25-33, ESV)

There are some things that you cannot do halfway. You can't do a backflip off the diving board only halfway. Unless you go all in, you're in trouble. You can't climb the corporate ladder halfway, showing up to work on time *sometimes*. You can't cast a vision for your company halfway and expect people to follow. You can't love your kids halfway. And you can't make your wedding vows halfway, promising to be faithful *most* of the time.

For some things, going at it halfway and half-heartedly simply won't do. For some things, the only option is going all in. But this is good news—for *what would a life be that never went all in for anything?* This is the case with discipleship and the point Jesus makes in our passage today.

**You cannot be a disciple of Jesus half-heartedly; you cannot follow Him halfway.
The only option is going all in.**

Going all in with Him is the path of life; it is the way to peace,¹ rest,² joy,³ and life.⁴ However, paradoxically, the path of life is narrow and hard.⁵ And the way to go all in with Jesus requires great cost—death to our old way of life and old self. Today we consider the third mark of a disciple:

A disciple is all in. This means a disciple wholeheartedly accepts the cost of discipleship. But they do so aware that through the cost, comes great gain.

Jesus sets forth what this looks like in Luke 14, stressing what going all in for Him will cost. He uses sharp rhetoric to expose what might get in the way of full commitment to Him. Three times between verses 25-33 Jesus will state a condition, then conclude that if this condition is not met, a person “cannot be my disciple” (vv., 26, 27, 33).

- “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he **cannot be my disciple.**” (Luke 14:26)
- “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me **cannot be my disciple.**” (Luke 14:27)
- “...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has **cannot be my disciple.**” (Luke 14:33)

Jesus offers two illustrations of what the person is like who jumps headlong into following Him without first being aware of these costs: “they are like starting to build a tower, without first asking if you have the money to complete it.” (vv. 28-30); “they are like a king going out to fight, without first asking if his forces can face the opposition.” (vv. 31-32)

The Anglican churchman, John Stott, once summarized this passage, “The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers.”⁶

Jesus’ point here is as clear as it is sobering; discipleship requires going radically all in, and one must weigh carefully whether they are willing to pay that cost. This teaching is hard, and intentionally so. Jesus has large crowds following Him (v. 25). He knows many follow for the wrong reasons. They want to use Jesus to further their agendas, rather than lose themselves for the sake of following His.

However, while these words are strong, they are actually strong medicine. Jesus is offering the only antidote to a life enslaved to disordered loves and self-centeredness that drifts into self-obsession and a false sense of control. Jesus is a physician who has come to heal the sick, even if His treatment feels at times like undergoing an amputation.⁷

What I want to do in this sermon is help us not only to count the cost of discipleship but also to see more deeply the gain that comes through paying the cost. Following Christ requires a type of death; but following Christ is always, and ultimately, about the promise of true life. To see this, I want to note two deep truths at work in this teaching, asking how they apply to us: living comes through dying, and Jesus makes the impossible decision impossible not to make.

I. Living Comes through Dying

Jesus stresses three types of costs required of disciples: one dealing with *loves*, one with *self-denial*, and one with *possessions*. Each one, properly understood, is also a path into life.

1. Love nothing more than Jesus

When Jesus says a disciple must “hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters” (v. 26), He is not commanding or condoning hate.⁸ Rather, He is using strong rhetoric to say something about love. A disciple must love Jesus above all else.

An individual’s love for her family cannot come between her allegiance to Jesus. A family’s love for their country of origin cannot get in the way of their allegiance to Jesus. A church’s love of its building, denomination, or prestige, cannot come between its allegiance to Jesus. A disciple must love Jesus above all else. For early Jewish followers of Jesus to modern-day Muslim followers, choosing Jesus may mean losing family. This is horribly painful.

A. Jesus’ opinion goes first

For all of us, however, this means that the final arbiter when it comes to making decisions and making sense of our lives is Jesus, not mom or dad, or wife or siblings. This does not mean that we don’t seek counsel or take advice (the Bible encourages such). It means there are times when our loved one’s opinions are not the most important voice. There are times when only Jesus can make sense of how our life is going—and we need to put His opinion first.

B. Jesus becomes what we love most

This also means that Jesus consistently is becoming the greatest object of our love and affections. There are things we love that won't ultimately satisfy us because they can't truly reconcile us with God. To the soul made for God, anything other than God is a broken cistern: "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

The disciple is beckoned into a journey where the deepest longing of their heart is connected to the object that will most satisfy: their God-hunger is oriented toward God. As Augustine wrote, our loves are disordered. And like someone with an underdeveloped palate, we often don't enjoy the things that we are made to enjoy. And there is a process we undergo where our taste buds are developed in order to enjoy Christ. C. S. Lewis once wrote of the enjoyment of Greek poetry:

A student setting out to experience the joys of reading Sophocles begins not in the heights of picking up the poet's style or cadence, but in the doldrums of verb tenses and noun declensions. But for the student who will press forward, there is a joy to be tasted that satisfies.⁹

When Jesus calls a disciple to love Him more than mother or father or spouse or children, He is calling them to open their soul to a heavenly banquet; but often the tasting of this develops slowly and only over time. But Jesus is the living water, the bread of life, that which will satisfy. The call to love nothing above Jesus is the call to put His opinion and pleasure first and to make enjoying fellowship with Him a priority. A second cost Jesus states, which also is a path to life, has to do with a self-denial that is willing to accept rejection.

2. A self-denial willing to accept rejection and hardship

Jesus says in v. 27 that a disciple must take up their cross. If discipleship is following Jesus and becoming like Jesus, then we can expect it will result in surrendering our will to the Father's will and facing the rejection that comes from a life lived for God amid a world in rebellion against God.

A. Surrender our will to God's

Jesus' life was marked by a surrendering of His will to the will of His Father. This comes out in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus desires that the cup of suffering pass from Him but concludes in prayer, "Father, not my will but yours."

We will need to daily lay down our own will, daily deny our so-called right to ourselves. Here, we are asking God to change our orientation from being about ourselves to being about His business. And there is a great freedom and rest that comes with living in surrender to the will of God.

B. Additional suffering

We must also recognize that following God's will may lead us into more hardships. A specific way Jesus felt this came through rejection by man. We need to be willing to face social rejection in order to follow God's will. It's feeling a subtle rejection from polished peers because you come out as a Christian—a "religious freak" in their eyes. It's risking a less grandiose career because faithfulness to Christ closes certain doors. It's being known in your neighborhood as closed-minded because you decided to be clear about your faith at a block party. For a church in America, it's risking the loss of social prestige and societal relevance. This is the cross Jesus has in mind.

You cannot follow Jesus without undergoing the same self-denial He did and facing some of the same rejection He did. But again, there is life that comes through this type of death. The Apostle Paul speaks of coming to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). We don't suffer the same things Christ suffered—which is having the sin of the world laid upon our conscience and the penalty of sin poured out on our soul. But we do share in a form of His suffering. This is when we share in His rejection by the world and the hardships that faithfulness to God requires in a fallen world.

We know from human experience that shared suffering creates a capacity for connection: soldiers who have both been in combat have a capacity to connect that a soldier who has never fought doesn't; athletes who have both played at the collegiate level can bond of their shared experience of how much devotion it took.¹⁰

The cost of discipleship is taking up a cross of self-denial, but through this, we gain a new rest and fellowship with Christ.

3. Realize God is your greatest resource

Thirdly, in v. 33, Jesus deals with possessions, “renounce all you have.” Jesus does not require every follower to sell all they have. The tax collector Zacchaeus only gives away “half of his goods” (Luke 19:8), and Jesus says that “salvation has come to his house” (Luke 19:9). However, we must be careful not to over-spiritualize Jesus’ words here. Jesus truly must stand between us and everything we possess if we are to follow Him. There can be nothing we cling to more than we cling to Him.

There is freedom in surrender

There is life that flows through this wound as well. There is the freedom that comes to those who surrender all to Christ. When Jesus asks us to renounce all our possessions He exposes the lie that we have ever been in ultimate control of life. Whether it be the random asteroid, deadly germ, or market downturn, our lives are far more fragile than we typically recognize. To ask a man to stop leaning on that which cannot hold him so that he can find rest in that which will never let him fall is no hard word; it is grace. When you graft a branch onto a tree, you need an open cut on both the tree and the branch. It’s only through this “wound” that sap and life can flow, thus bringing the two together into one shared life.

The cost of discipleship is that place where we are undergoing a wounding, a cutting open, where our lives can be attached to the Savior whose own hands and feet and side are wounded. For the disciple of the Crucified Nazarene, living comes through dying.

Satan loves a Christianity without the Cross

There is a certain urgency to this teaching. There is a temptation to take the cross out of Christianity, the cost of our discipleship, that goes back to the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Before Jesus even started calling disciples, Satan began tempting Jesus to choose a path for glory that didn’t require the cross (Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11). During Jesus’ ministry, after teaching His disciples that He “must suffer many things and be rejected ... and be killed” (Mark 8:31), Peter refuses to accept this and rebukes Jesus. Jesus responds by rebuking Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Mark 8:31-33).

Down through the ages of church history, Satan tempts the church to embrace a Christianity without the cross, a discipleship without any cost. Especially in the modern era—call it cheap-grace, the prosperity Gospel, or the more recent secular offering of Christian morality without Christian belief—, we are tempted to embrace a pseudo-Christianity with no cost.

Rather than becoming what we love most, Jesus comes to bless whatever we love more than Him. Rather than calling us to rejection by men, Jesus comes to help us find favor with the men who have rejected Him. Rather than standing between us and our possessions, Jesus comes to enlarge our barns.

The danger here is great. A gospel without the cross of Christ is no gospel; it's just another self-help form of spirituality. And a discipleship without any cost is not fellowship with the crucified Lord; it's just another version of cutting our own path. It leaves us unattached to the vine, the source of life; we remain broken branches strewn about the forest floor. I want to turn to a second truth we need to grasp when reading this passage: Jesus makes the impossible decision, impossible not to make.

II. Jesus Makes the Impossible Decision, Impossible Not to Make

Important to notice in v. 27 is the little phrase, "*his own*" that precedes the word "cross." Each disciple has *his own* cross to take up. Here is where Christianity gets personal to each of us; here is where Jesus separates us each from the group and lays upon us our own unique cross to bear. It is not uncommon for the cross set before us to feel impossible to bear.

For about two years in my early twenties, I wrestled intensely with God's call to follow Him. It was not a wrestling with the truth of Christianity. It was a wrestling with the cost of discipleship. At the time, my unique cross was turning out to be a call to full-time ministry. (There is nothing more noble or hard about this type of call; it's just what mine was) I wish I could say I said "yes" to this with joy, but I was terrified.

At the time, the specifics of the step meant parachurch ministry in urban Philadelphia. I would need to raise support and work in neighborhoods where I feared I would have trouble fitting in. Going in this

direction felt the opposite of what all my friends were doing. I just couldn't see how it was going to work out, but at the same time, it felt like an irrevocable call.

One Friday evening I was in a church for a wedding rehearsal—I was a groomsman in a buddy's wedding. Everyone had left but I'd stayed in the sanctuary for a while to pray. I remember saying to God, *"I feel like you are putting me into a coffin. That's what this feels like. You are placing me in a coffin. I just have to die—I have to let go of control, dreams, friendships, expectations if I am going to move forward with this. It feels awful."* There have been a few times I felt God walk me into a spot like this—but that was the first and hardest; it was the big decision to get out of the boat.

Have you ever come to that spot when saying yes to God feels like saying no to life—life as you've imagined it? How do we make the step out of the boat? How do we do what feels impossible?

As I've reflected on my own experience in light of scripture, I've come to understand how we make these impossible steps into the cost of discipleship—or, how Jesus makes the seemingly impossible decision, impossible to say no to.

1. It's Jesus' decision, not ours

First, however the call of Christ hits you in its personal way, recognize that it's not your idea but God's decision. God called Abraham, Moses, Isaiah; Jesus called the disciples and Paul; it's no different with us. Following Jesus into the hard place He's calling you is His idea, His decision, and His doing. It's not some crazy religious experience you conjure up to feel good about yourself; it's not some young persons need to save the world. The call of Christ comes from Christ—we receive it, we don't make it.

2. Jesus will make it impossible to have Him and say no to Him at the same time

The corner Jesus gets us into is when we realize that we cannot have Him and say no to His call at the same time. In this sense, Jesus makes it impossible for the man or woman who wants Him to do anything but follow Him. It is as though He makes the decision for you—even if you kick and scream as you go. There comes a point when you and He know that you must, and you will, say yes—even if it takes time.

3. Don't step towards understanding, step towards Jesus

Finally, stepping out into the hardness of discipleship is not a step into understanding, as though we can see the twists and turns of the path we are on. The truth is, we have no idea what the future holds when we start following Jesus. However, it is a step *towards Jesus*. Peter steps out of the boat, not into an unknown sea, but towards a known man—Jesus.

And when we step out to Jesus, we are only stepping towards the Lord who has already paid the cost to step towards us. Jesus said yes to loving us more than His life; Jesus said yes to taking up a cross in order to save us, and Jesus said yes to losing all His heavenly grandeur and possessions in order to come to us (Philippians 2).¹¹

What concrete step is the Lord asking you to make that scares you or seems too hard?

Is He asking you to end an unhealthy dating relationship?

Is He asking you to be the fiancé who leads spiritually rather than being spiritually lethargic?

Is He asking you to confess a sin?

Is He asking you to make amends with someone?

Is He asking you to give resources to someone or something?

Is He asking you to lay the dreams you have for your life at His feet?

Is He asking you to face the unknown future with only Him to rely on?

If you sense any such questions from our Lord, take heart: you are being called deeper into the life of a disciple. And there are some things you simply cannot do half-heartedly. And following the Son of God, risen from the dead, the Lord of the universe, is one.

You can trust Jesus when He calls you to take up your cross and follow because Jesus has already taken up His cross for you.

Endnotes

1. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).
2. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).
3. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11)
4. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16); "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).
5. "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:14).
6. John Stott, *Basic Christianity*. 3rd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 112.
7. "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (Colossians 3:5).
8. This would contradict his summation of the law: "love God and love neighbor" (Mark 12:30-31).
9. See C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*.
10. Other ways the costliness of discipleship is the path of experiencing new life: (3) Righteous suffering alleviates sinful despair. E.g., making amends and resisting temptation. (4) It is the hardships that we learn faith and practice prayer, both pathways to enjoying the new life we have with God. (5) It is only in radical obedience that we receive God's blessing: "You do not want to subject some sinful passion, an enmity, a hope, your life plans, or your reason to Jesus' commandment? Do not be surprised that you do not receive the Holy Spirit, that you cannot pray, that your prayer for faith remains empty!" (Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 66).
11. The Son of Man has no place to lay his head; E.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Discipleship*, captures this stepping out, not into the known, but towards Jesus, well: "The disciple is thrown out of the relative security of life into complete insecurity (which in truth is absolute security and protection in community with Jesus); out of the foreseeable and calculable realm (which in truth is unreliable) into the completely unforeseeable, coincidental realm (which in truth is the only necessary and reliable one)" (Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 58)