

Luke 14:25-33

25Now 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.

Good morning, my name is John Seago, I'm an elder here at City Life Church. After taking a few months off of the preaching rotation, I'm excited to be back here to bring God's word to you this morning.

In the book *Strangers Drowning*, Larissa MacFarquhar, tells the stories of do-gooders. Individuals who dedicate their lives to various causes or efforts to make the world a better place or at least diminish suffering in it. These individuals feel such a sense of duty they decide not only to dedicate themselves to non-profits, leper colonies, humanitarian efforts, but decide to give as much of their money away as possible. Charles was an anti-poverty activist who after a moral awakening, gave away half of his inherited funds then decided he wasn't giving away enough of his regular income either. “He kept thinking how wrong it was for them to have so much when so many others had nothing, and after some time he came up with the idea that he should live on his fair share of the world's wealth – what he called the World Equity Budget, or WEB. His first notion of this was simply to divide the world's total income by the number of people. But then [had to figure out the problem of population growth]. He ended up with a figure of about twelve hundred dollars a year. His wife refused to join him – she felt that giving away half her money was enough. She told him he had to choose between the World Equity Budget and her. Even though he still loved her, and they had been married for thirty years and had two children together, he chose the budget, and they got divorced. He gave away all his possessions except for a few clothes and household items.” She tells story after story of people who were so dedicated to a cause, an ethical principle, they painstakingly weighed the cost and willingly embraced great sacrifice to live out a moral conviction.

In our passage this morning Jesus tells us the cost of following him. He does not make a soft ask or promise that Christianity can be an inconsequential addition to our life. No he makes clear that his call is absolute. Only if you make Jesus the first priority can you be his disciple. This teaching is often called the cost of *discipleship* because in our passage, Jesus says if you don't do this “you cannot be my disciple.” This is a very common churchy term, like ‘check your heart,’ but what does disciple or discipleship mean? In ancient near eastern culture, a disciple is a student or a pupil. Disciples sat at the feet of great teachers. They were initiates into a school or group following that leader or a great Rabbi, thus simply called “followers.”¹ Jesus repeatedly calls his disciples to “Come to me,” or “Come after me” essentially a command for them to follow in his path. All Christians are to be disciples. He is addressing regular people here not the religious elite.²

¹ That's why throughout the NT you'll see Jesus' followers call him Rabbi or teacher, which would be very similar to us calling someone our mentor.

² V25: Audience here is not leadership, religious leaders, not even just his disciplines or followers, but the whole crowd. Regular people.

We'll look at three aspects of being a disciple, three elements of following Christ:

1. Deliberate: Count the cost
2. Costly: What is the cost
3. Loving Submission: Incalculable gain

I. **First, we look at how following Jesus must be Deliberate: We should count the cost.**

Jesus is making the point here that one does not simply stumble his way into his path, one does not wander aimlessly and find himself accidentally following him. The do-gooders we talked about did not wake up and suddenly more than half of their income was being sent to charity. Similarly, following Christ must be a deliberate and intentional act. Jesus gives us two parables to show this. **First, Building a Tower.** Jesus says in verse 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”* Jesus is talking about a security tower one would build on your property to watch a valuable vineyard or to protect your estate. Before beginning construction, a wise person would assess the expense, and ensure its achievable before wasting time and money on the project. Like planning vacation, you should not just buy tickets before seeing if you can afford it or take that time off from work. This endeavor requires reflection, not impulse. We also should assess whether one is ready to take on a personal commitment and sacrifice required to follow Jesus.³

Look at what happens when the cost is not counted first, the project is not completed. The foundation and building stand as an unfinished monument to your foolishness.⁴ I have some of these at my house from failed home improvement projects. Didn't look for a stud before drilling a huge hole in the wall. For us, not counting the cost to follow Christ results in a compromised witness and bad reputation for the church. For example, a person drifting from the faith because of the difficulty of trying to glorify the Lord in their life. Others who know that person was a Christian see's Christianity, not as a serious response to a real God, but a hobby someone can pick up and put down when its convenient. Have you thought about the impact your faith is having on the reputation of Christ or the church? Do your coworkers think MORE and HIGHER of Christianity because of you? Usually we hope our neighbors or friends realize Christians do not all fit into those terrible stereotypes, but what do they think of Christ? In his powerful book *Disruptive Witness*, Alan Noble argues “The gospel is not a preference. It's not another piece of flair we add to our vest. It's something far more beautiful and disturbing. The gospel is the power to raise the dead, to proclaim the greatness of God in a fallen and confused world.” Is Christianity merely flair on your vest? A hobby or pastime you've casually adopted? Something you stumbled into without honest and deep consideration? Maybe you've been a Christian for years, started out genuine, but its become just a habit or hobby now.

Then Jesus gives us another image, **a king going to war.** Jesus continues in verse 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? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”* Before going into a battle, the King should examine if there is a pathway to victory. The rhetorical question here is what king wouldn't consider the cost of going into war? Any competent leader would. I work in public policy/politics and part of my job is to interview candidates for our Political Action Committee that gets involved in elections and campaigns. When we interview a candidate, we ask them all the policy and principle questions to make sure

³ Bock, 1288. “A decision to pledge allegiance to Jesus is one of great moment and is to be entered into with sober reflection.” No like a diet fad, cleaning out the fridge and pantry, just to abandon the diet and go back to regular habits a week later.

⁴ This would have been a powerful deterrent for the original audience that lived in an honor and shame society.

they align with our core goals and mission, but also we ask about their plan to win the race. How many doors are you going to knock, how much funding do you need, what areas of the district are going to be the most difficult, etc. There are some great politicians who ideologically align with us 100%, but have no clue about how to win. Why would my organizations go campaign for them, risk our reputation, give them money if they have not strategized how to win the election? Disciples also should reflect what it will cost to follow Christ.

But there's a stronger point to this second parable. The builder of the tower was free to decide whether or not to build the tower. But the king was forced into a situation that required him to make a decision. He was facing another army, and had to decide whether to battle with it or seek peace. This is more appropriate for us, because we all have to answer the call of Christ. The gospel demands a reply. Furthermore, the second image asks "consider what refusing the 'more powerful one' will mean." "Can you enter into battle against him?"⁵ Sometimes a candidate comes and asks us to endorse them running against an extremely powerful sitting elected official who could stop my bills from passing if I lose and they get re-elected. You've heard the quote 'when you come at the king, you best not miss.'⁶ So, the first parable is about counting what it will cost to follow Jesus, the second parable is that we should count the cost of NOT following Jesus. We have to reflect upon the consequences of walking away from Christ's call to follow him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light."⁷ Are you humble before the Lord this morning? When you think about your faith, about church, believing in God, do you have a gospel fear? My pride and self-obsession are exposed as pedantic when I face the truth that God is the greater King. He is infinite, I am finite. He is my creator, I am the creation. He is eternal, sovereign, cosmic, omnipotent... but he's not just more powerful, he's good. That's the heart of the gospel. We sinned against the creator, yet he came to us as a redeemer to take our punishment and restore us to himself. Nothing is more important than whether this story is true. There is no bigger question we should intentionally reflect on other than how do I respond to the gospel. Whether you're a Christian this morning, grew up in the church, or new, we have to deliberately consider this call to follow Christ.

II. And to our second point, following Christ is costly. So, what are the costs?

Jesus tells us that discipleship could cost relationships, possessions, and life. At the beginning of our passage, right out of the gate, Jesus in verse 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.*" So Jesus anti-family? That's a hot take. Doesn't this contradict Jesus' call to love others more than ourselves? Jesus' grammar and terminology here indicates this is an obvious rhetorical point. Commonly, the command to hate something means loving it so much less it seems like hate. Could use the term "devalue" instead of "hate." Jesus explains this idea in Matthew 10, with easier rhetoric when he says, "*Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*"⁸ While loving and valuing family is an objective good that the Bible does command, our love for God to be paramount.⁹ We saw this in the parable of the Wedding Banquet, an invited guest refused to come to the feast and gave the excuse of family. A man said he was just married and could not attend the celebration. While family is a good thing, obedience and devotion to God is better.¹⁰ This is why me and my wife

⁵ Bock, 1289.

⁶ Omar Little on 'The Wire' paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 37.

⁸ Matthew 10:36-39. When we think we find contradictions in the Bible, we use clear passages to explain difficult ones.

⁹ For example, Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,"

¹⁰ Jesus himself shows us this by example in Matthew 12:46-50.

throw off our kids schedule for city group. Wednesday is a school night and when we host city group, kids get to bed an hour and a half later than our usual strict schedule. Thursdays are hard, but Christ has called us to live in community and love the church more than our or our children's convenience. Plus, this is one way we can teach our kids the gospel. This is us giving them tangible proof of what we read and teach to them. Parents, are you prioritizing your children over Christ and following his call?

That may seem harsh this morning, but for Jesus' immediate audience in the first century, those deciding to follow Jesus could automatically pay the cost of being alienated by their family.¹¹ Growing up in the church or some communities in America, it is the opposite, you go to church, act like a Christian to be accepted. However, in Luke's context and in many places today (in the middle east or Asia), becoming a Christian means being unilaterally denounced by your family, forfeiting your inheritance, losing your standing in community, have no social connections at all anymore. Millions of Christians today have made that choice.

Jesus also says, being his disciple, following where he leads will cost us our **possessions**. In verse 33, Jesus adds we must also distance ourselves from materialistic attachment to the world. He says, "*So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*"¹² We should ask, not how little can I give and get away with, but how much does God deserve.¹³ What is he asking for? We have many great examples right here in City Life Church those who have passed up higher salaries or more steady careers to follow Christ: our staff, our pastoral resident and his wife, Darvin Tan, Alison Eschew, many others. They are following Christ with tangible sacrifices and material risk. Why do we cling so tightly to our possessions? A home, a new car, that 10% of my paycheck that sometimes goes to the church. Why are these so enticing? Material possessions promise us what we find in Christ: comfort, security, and worth. We become followers of these things, placing our faith in them to steer us to happiness. Hebrews 12 calls these things entanglements, hindrances that are slowing us down and we should set them aside to run our race looking to Christ. What possession is in your life right now that you can't let go of? Is there anything the Lord is convicting you of that you've placed above him in priority? Oh Lord, help me renounce all this clutter, so I can clearly see you & where you lead.

Lastly on costs, Jesus clarified that following him **costs us our life**. In verse 26, Jesus says we must hate even our own life to be a disciple. Look, then says in verse 27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. We often think of a hero giving up his life for a cause, like we've seen in countless movies. But, look at that phrase, "*to bear his own cross and come after me.*" It's an ongoing process of suffering, struggle, and bearing the cross. Not necessarily the idea of will you die for Jesus or not in a moment of critical decision. Its more persistent than that.¹⁴ In Luke 9:23-24 he says to take up our cross every-day to follow him.¹⁵ Think of Martin Luther King, Jr. who ultimately lost his life for following Christ into the public square, but before that months and months, weeks after weeks, day after day of suffering attacks, threats, violence, attempts to publicly shame him, even attacks from leaders in the church.¹⁶ This is the kind of daily dying to self-interest to obey God's call. Day after day.

¹¹ Bock, 1285. "If someone desired acceptance by family more than a relationship with God, one might never come to Jesus, given the rejection that would inevitably follow." In the first century, "there could be no casual devotion to Jesus...A decision for Christ marked a person and automatically came with a cost."

¹² Bock, 1290. "The will to renounce all possessions and to ally oneself totally to Jesus is the essence of discipleship. Jesus is first. He is the one object of focus."

¹³ Bock, 1290. "A disciple's attachments are potentially the most destructive thing for discipleship."

¹⁴ Jesus is foretelling of difficulty and struggle to continue to obey him, not simply execution.

¹⁵ Joel Green, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 109. "Cross-bearing must mean embracing and serving in a single-minded way (setting one's face to) the redemptive purpose of God."

¹⁶ See *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby.

For me, the hardest part of this is giving up my plan for my life, my ideal career trajectory, or even giving up my plan to ‘change the world.’ Recently I was facing some doubts about my current job and weighing possible career and education options. My ultimate question was where can I have the biggest impact in the world, not where is Jesus leading me. See I assumed God would bless my decision, because after all doesn't he want me to use my education and talents well? Of course, but I was not willing to submit to him leading me somewhere I didn't think I was going to be very effective. Do you trust the Lord with your life, your education or career, your family's future, relationships you may lose? Do you trust the Lord with those aspects of your life? This is not would you take a bullet, this is would you wake up early on a Sunday to come serve at church, would you pass on a career option to continue loving your co-workers or neighbors God has called you to now? This gets us back to what it really means to be a disciple, following him.¹⁷

If you're a Christian this morning, maybe you're feeling the cost. You've made sacrifices, you feel the weight of following Christ. Remember, the reward we get is God himself. “Jesus asks nothing of us without giving us the strength to perform it. His commandment never seeks to destroy life, but to foster, strengthen and heal it.”¹⁸ Jesus says “Come after me.” This means, we walk with the Lord, not in front of him, just hoping he'll bless the direction we're going in.¹⁹ This gets us to our third aspect of discipleship. Following Christ is loving submission.

III. Loving Submission: To follow Christ is to lovingly submit to him.

Sometimes in Christianity this discussion of counting the cost could give us the impression that we're the judge, that we need to determine what risks and sacrifices we're willing to make to gain these benefits. Being the Capitalists that we are, we're tempted to ask what's the return on investment for this whole Jesus thing? As (post-enlightenment) Western Christians we treat Jesus' teaching here as an invitation to crunch the numbers like our do-gooders writing out their charitable giving in a spreadsheet. The French Christian Philosopher Blaise Pascal emphasized the priority of the individual and the deeply personal character of our *choice* to believe in God.²⁰ His modern form of Christianity values extreme *inwardness* and obsession with our personal spiritual life.²¹ This led him to write a well-known pragmatic argument for the existence of God, called ‘Pascal's Wager.’ He asserts that belief in God is pragmatically justified because we have little to lose and everything to gain from being a Christian.²² Essentially, Pascal created a payoff matrix for belief in God. Look here at this chart.

	I. God exists	II. God does not exist
i. I believe	A. Infinite gain minus finite loss	B. Finite loss
ii. I do not believe	C. Finite gain minus infinite loss	D. Finite gain

There are two options. Row 1- I believe in God. Row 2 – I do not believe in God. Then these two possibilities: Column 1 – God does actually exist Column 2 – God does not actually exist. Pascal argues we should bet on believing in God since that is most likely to yield the best gain. See, the best outcome is (A) If we believe and God exists then the reward is infinite and

¹⁷ Bock, 1286

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 38.

¹⁹ Like hiking and telling the one behind you who really knows where to go, “just tell me if I go in the wrong direction.” That's foolish. Joel Green, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 108. “Being with Jesus suggests companionship with Jesus, sharing in his success and failure, his acceptance and rejection; it entails identifying with and being shaped by Jesus' own life and mission.”

²⁰ This is why he's often considered a proto-existentialist.

²¹ Similar to Christians Augustine and Kierkegaard before him.

²² JP Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 159-160.

we only gave up a finite amount of opportunities to sin, etc. The worst outcome is (C) if God does exist, but we failed to believe in him (C).²³ This argument assumes that I am the final authority and priority and I should maximize the benefit of my choices.”²⁴ As a philosophy student, this is interesting and clever, but this is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the gospel of me. We live in self-obsession, so this is tempting since, as the American Philosopher Taylor Swift tells us, “I promise that you'll never find another like me.” We need to confess of self-obsession this morning. Church, when Christ calls us to count the cost of following him, he is not asking us to become a self-sufficient judge weighing whether he benefits us. Our creator, who knit us together, our redeemer who knows us better than ourselves, and knows what is best for us, our heavenly father who longs to reconcile with us is calling. He's urging us to drop our other priorities and come to him. Like that beautiful scene in the parable of the prodigal son, the father is ready to run and embrace us and bring us back into his family. We need to take this decision to follow Christ seriously, we need to prioritize him above all else in our lives, but we need to do it out of submission to him, not in our strength of conviction like a do-gooder sticking to their moral code out of guilt or shame like a mere some altruistic do-gooder. We're to be driven by a personal love for the God and humbly believe him.

Look at the example of Jesus. He too was following God the Father's leadership but his obedience was not a cold calculation, but loving submission. See in our passage, Jesus is telling his disciples to do something he himself was doing. already did. In the book of Luke, Jesus is getting closer and closer to Jerusalem, knowing that humiliation, persecution, and a painful death await him there.²⁵ Philippians 2 tells us Jesus took the form of a servant, humbled himself in obedience to the point of death. Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, so every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Why did Christ come? So that he would be exalted as a reward? No. Christ came to glorify the father whom he loved and obeyed to the point of a humiliating death. He said, “*I do ^aas the Father has commanded me, ^aso that the world may know that I love the Father.*”²⁶ The Apostle Paul prays that Christ may dwell in [Christian's] hearts through faith that you, being rooted and grounded in love and that we'll comprehend... the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, and that we'll be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁷ This is a blessing, not a weight. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that “following Jesus will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience.”²⁸ Submission is saying the Lord knows better than I do, I'm not carrying the weight to make the right bet. Oh friends, we don't need to coldly calculate the cost of following Christ, we need to pray for deeper love and stronger affection for God that we can devalue everything else. Let's count the cost and denounce all in our way to the giver of life and joy himself, our savior.

²³ If we believe and God does not exist (B), well we are only losing a finite amount of good. But if we don't believe it's the opposite, gained a little bit if we're right (D)

²⁴ JP Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 159, “This is relying on a principle in decision theory called the expected utility principle, in order to maximize the utility or benefit of my choices, I should multiply each of the mutually exclusive outcomes by the probability of each of the two states' obtaining, add these products together, then make that choice having the highest expected utility.”

²⁵ Luke told us earlier that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51)—to the place where he will die on a cross. When Jesus decide to continue working his way to Jerusalem, he didn't weighing the pros and cons, likelihood of maximizing expected utility.

²⁶ Jesus says in John 5, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father^a does, that the Son does likewise.”

²⁷ Ephesians 3:17-19.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 37