

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

September 5, 2021 | *The Cost of Being a Disciple*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- How has following Jesus been costly for you?
- Read Luke 14:25–35.
- Pray that God will help you isolate the main points of this passage and apply them to your life.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Becoming a disciple of Jesus demands sacrifice.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Sacrifice is a key part of the gospel, both for Jesus and for us.

☒ MEDITATE

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to compare counting the cost of various services to counting the cost of following Jesus.

Q: *What monthly subscription services do you pay for?*

Q: *How do you determine whether these services are worth the price you are paying?*

As internet usage has become more ubiquitous, we have seen a steady rise in the number of subscription services. For a nominal monthly fee, you can have access to a large amount of content that would cost you a great deal more if you were to purchase the rights instead. It seems like a good deal! Economists, however, have noticed that these subscription services have become a drain on the resources of many Americans. One research firm found that Americans waste \$348 a year on subscription services they do not use at all. This does not count the monthly services we pay for only to access specific content while ignoring the rest of what is offered. If we were to pay up front for what we actually use, it would typically take no more than two years for us to break even. Americans have gotten so used to paying for monthly subscriptions it seems they no longer count the costs of these services.

Q: *Have you adopted the same mindset toward following Jesus?*

Q: *How is counting the cost of following Jesus distinct from counting the cost of monthly subscriptions?*

APPLICATION POINT – In this passage, Jesus called His followers to count the cost of becoming His disciples. Jesus was not worried that His disciples would overlook the benefits of following Him, unlike our subscription services. Those benefits are assured for every true disciple. Jesus was concerned that many who followed Him had not considered the costs of becoming His disciples. Paul said if the resurrection is not true, meaning Christianity is not true, then Christians should be pitied above all others. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ demands sacrifice. As a Christian, there is something about your life that, in the eyes of the world, is less than it should be because you have committed your life to Christ. And if Christianity turns out to be false, you have robbed yourself in vain. As you work your way through this lesson, identify the sacrifices you are making to be a disciple of Jesus. You cannot determine if Jesus is worth the cost if you are unaware of what you are paying. You also cannot count the cost of following Jesus if you really are not sacrificing anything.

📌 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This week's passage calls everyone following Jesus to count the cost of becoming His disciple. This passage begins with Jesus's call and then uses two analogies and a metaphor to illustrate what Jesus has to say.

1. COUNT THE COST
2. TWO ILLUSTRATIONS
3. DO NOT HOLD BACK

GOING DEEPER

+This section will examine each part of this passage in closer detail and draw practical applications from the biblical teaching.

1. COUNT THE COST

📌 LUKE 14:25-27

🗣️: *What prompted Jesus's charge to His audience?*

🗣️: *Do you think Jesus won any followers on this occasion?*

Jesus typically drew a large crowd as He journeyed from town to town in Jewish territories. The crowds often followed Him from one destination to the next, creating quite an entourage. Jesus could have easily bought into the hype about Himself. We tend to get big-headed if we get a couple followers on Twitter. Imagine if people actually had to get up and move to follow us!

But Jesus saw through the hype and into the hearts of those who followed Him. He recognized that people followed Him for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to be healed. Others wanted to hear Him teach. A few likely wanted to be around for the next controversy, something Jesus seemed to find Himself in the midst of quite frequently. While we may be drawn in by a crowd hanging on our every word, Jesus gave little credence to the crowds who gathered

around Him. He knew they would disappear once the excitement abated or danger arose. Jesus wanted more than hype. He wanted hearts that were committed to following Him no matter the cost.

Q: *Why are you interested in Jesus?*

Q: *What could cause your interests in Him to fade?*

APPLICATION POINT – If Jesus refused to buy into the hype surrounding Him, then perhaps we should too! This may seem like an odd statement for a Christian to make. True believers seek to make much of Jesus, not less! We need to ensure that our interest in Jesus is authentic. Every Sunday our churches are filled with people who have somehow been caught up in the hype about Jesus without having an authentic relationship with Him. They are at church because their social network is there. They are at church because their family is. Some of them are there because they saw a parking lot full of cars. They may know enough to think they have a relationship with Jesus, but in reality, they have just followed the crowd. If you are a true follower of Jesus, you need to see through the hype surrounding Jesus and call others to seek Him through repentance and faith. The hype will never last, and it will never be enough to save those who are wrapped up in it. Only a relationship with Jesus can. This is what Jesus sought from the crowds. This is what we must seek as well.

Q: *How in the world can we follow someone who demands that we hate our families and ourselves?*

Q: *What Scriptures can help us understand Luke 14:26?*

If you were to create a list of the Scriptures that Christians put on display in their homes, Luke 14:26 probably would not be on it. This verse certainly catches the unsuspecting reader off guard. We need not conclude, of course, Jesus expects His followers to hate their families. He was using a common Semitic idiom in this verse. An idiom is a manner of speaking that is common within one culture but easily misunderstood by others. This one emphasizes a point by declaring the opposite polarity. The opposites in this case are love and hate. Jesus was simply demanding that we love Him more than father and mother, wife and children. This idiom is evident at other points in Scripture, also with the love/hate polarity (Genesis 29:30–31; Deuteronomy 21:15–

17; Matthew 6:24). Matthew, in a parallel text to Luke 14:26, clarifies the idiom used in this passage by stating Jesus's followers must love Him more than their nearest kin.

Recognizing this idiom takes away the initial shock of this verse, but we are still left with a challenge. Most of us would struggle to think of loving anyone more than we love our families. This is because we do not understand how love works. Love is like the Tupperware cabinet above my sink. As long as I place every piece in the proper sequence, every piece of Tupperware I own fits neatly inside my cabinet. But if one piece gets out of order, everything falls apart. The cabinet's capacity is diminished exponentially. The same is true in how we love Jesus and our families. If we refuse to put Jesus first, our capacity for love is greatly diminished. The key to loving our families more is ensuring that Jesus is our first love.

Q: *If our loves get out of order, who usually rises to the top of the list?*

Q: *What does loving Jesus more than family look like for you?*

APPLICATION POINT – I have a cousin whose family is very into sports. Her children are involved in several different sports throughout the year. They live out of state, and one summer when my family was visiting them, I learned the children were not currently playing in any sporting leagues. I asked whether she or the children had burned out for a season. She said they were not burned out, but the leagues had started scheduling games on Sunday mornings. She and her husband are very committed to their faith in Jesus, and they refused to regularly miss church in order for their kids to participate. Even though her children were admittedly upset at missing the chance to play, they decided their commitment to Jesus was more important than even their commitment to their children. This is a simple example of loving Jesus more than loving your children and of how maintaining that priority allowed them to love their children more than they could have otherwise. If my cousin had decided to love her kids more than Jesus, she could have let them play on Sundays, but her capacity for love would have been greatly diminished. Not only would she not have loved Jesus more, she also would not be loving her children as much as she could because she would be keeping them out of church, where they would learn to experience God's love for themselves. Sometimes loving Jesus more will require a greater sacrifice than soccer games, but Jesus is worth it, no matter the price.

Q: *What does Jesus demand of those who would follow Him?*

Q: *What does it mean for a follower of Jesus to bear a cross?*

Today, the cross is a well-known symbol of Christianity. Christians adorn their houses with them and wear them as jewelry. But for those living during the first century, the cross was a means of an excruciating execution. We rejoice in the cross because Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. For us, the cross has become a sign of victory. Jesus's audience would not have shared this background. Jesus's demand would have been shocking, and of course, that was His point. Following Jesus down a road requires nothing but curiosity. To bear a cross demands everything. Jesus knows a time will come when His disciples will endure extreme persecution. Falling in with a crowd will not be enough at that point.

Q: *How can you adapt the symbol of the cross and retain its first-century connotations?*

Q: *In what ways may you be called to forfeit your life for the cause of Christ?*

APPLICATION – Most of us do not live in danger because of our Christian beliefs, but that is not the case for many Christians around the world. “Andre” was a missionary serving in a country closed to Christianity. After convincing two people to become followers of Jesus Christ, Andre had to confront them with Jesus's command to bear the cross as they followed Him. He asked them to make a list of the twenty people they knew best. He then asked them to circle the names of the two people least likely to kill them for sharing their faith in Jesus Christ. He challenged these new converts to begin sharing their faith with the names they had circled. For these Christian brothers, bearing the cross was not theoretical. Their witness would put their lives in danger, but they could not hide their faith from others. Pray for believers who must risk their lives to share the faith we often take for granted. Pray that God would help you be faithful if the situation ever arises when you must carry your cross. You do not know what the next day holds.

Q: *What was Jesus seeking in this passage?*

Q: *What is the difference between accompanying Jesus and becoming His disciple?*

Jesus was unimpressed with the size of the crowd following Him. He saw through their excitement and recognized that many of them were simply caught up in the moment. Jesus wanted something more for them. He wanted to transform this group from mere followers into authentic disciples. Following Jesus down a dusty road achieves little. Committing to becoming His disciple will change everything. This is why Jesus turned to challenge the crowd behind Him. He had to crystalize for them the difference between being caught up in the excitement around Him and truly becoming His disciple. The difference is the willingness to die to oneself. A disciple of Christ must die to himself in order to live for Jesus.

Q: *Are you merely following Jesus or are you seeking to be His disciple?*

Q: *How will people who are not ready to become Jesus's disciples respond to the demands of these verses?*

APPLICATION POINT – What is the next step for you as a disciple of Jesus? This passage defines discipleship as dying to ourselves and living for Jesus Christ. We should not think of this as a one-time occurrence but as a process that continues for the rest of our lives. Some of us have been following along with a crowd of Jesus-enthusiasts but have resisted taking the next steps in the discipleship process. Perhaps the next steps in your discipleship process include becoming involved in a ministry connected with your church. Or dying to yourself may mean sharing your faith with a co-worker. Each time you take the next step you will find the same question on the other side. Will you die to yourself and become Jesus's disciple? Whenever you say, "that's enough," you cease becoming a disciple of Jesus and rejoin the crowd of Jesus-enthusiasts. How are you going to answer today?

2. TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

☐ LUKE 14:28–33

Q: *What two illustrations did Jesus use to challenge His audience to count the cost of discipleship?*

Q: *What was Jesus warning of in these illustrations?*

Being a disciple of Jesus demands death to self in order to live for Him. This is a costly decision, and Jesus knew that many of the ones following Him had not counted the cost of becoming an authentic disciple. Some of them may have seemed like authentic disciples, but they were just going through the motions of following Him. Jesus addressed them with two illustrations. The first concerns a builder who must consider whether he can afford to see his building through to completion. If he starts building and runs out of money before finishing, everyone will recognize his folly. The second concerns a king who must determine whether he can win a battle against another king. If he cannot, he must seek peace before the battle starts. The point of these illustrations is not about looking like a fool or losing a battle. The point is to carefully weigh whether you will be able to see a course of action through to completion. Count the cost of what you are doing. Do not make a hasty decision. Do not assume you can just go through the motions.

Q: *Can you merely go through the motions of the Christian life?*

Q: *What are the warning signs you could be going through the motions of the Christian life?*

APPLICATION POINT – These illustrations are not intended to caution us against pursuing discipleship but to caution us against merely going through the motions of pursuing discipleship. Discipleship is costly, and if we fail to count the cost, we will almost certainly fail to be authentic disciples. When we emerge from the crowd and say “yes” to becoming Jesus’s disciple, we give Him a blank check. We do not want to run out of funds when He goes to cash it.

Some people advise taking time off when you feel like you are just going through the motions. While this might work in the corporate world, you cannot take a break from being a disciple of Jesus. One of the best practices during these times is journaling. Putting your thoughts on paper can help you sort them out and renew your commitment to being a disciple. Furthermore, when you struggle in similar circumstances in the future, you can draw encouragement from reading your past entries.

3. DO NOT HOLD BACK

LUKE 14:34–35

Q: *What is the purpose of salt?*

Q: *What was Jesus illustrating with this metaphor?*

This passage concludes with a warning against trying to be an authentic disciple while reserving parts of your life for yourself. Jesus knew that the cost of authentic discipleship was high. He knew some in the crowd would want to be His disciples but would also want to hold back. The problem is that this creates only an empty shell of a disciple rather than the real thing. Jesus illustrated this warning with the image of salt. Salt served a variety of purposes in the ancient world and was a valuable commodity. If salt somehow lost its saltiness, however, all that would be left would be a few useless white specs. The same is true for disciples. If a disciple is something less than a totally committed follower of Christ, that person is completely useless for the cause of Christ.

Q: *In what ways are you trying to be an authentic disciple and live for yourself?*

Q: *Why would a person want to reserve a part of themselves from God?*

APPLICATION – Trying to reserve part of your life from God is like trying to live a double life. Rather than doubling your capacity for life, you will instead deplete your energy without ever having truly lived. The problem with such people is they have never truly repented of the idolatry that characterized their former lives. There is no such thing as an idolatrous disciple of Jesus.

The first step of discipleship is rooting out idolatry in your life. Every part of your heart that is devoted to an idol is a part God cannot fill. This week identify any lingering idols in your life and ask God to help you see that greater joy is found in Him.

NEXT STEPS

This lesson has challenged you to count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship always involves sacrifice. What sacrifice is God calling you to make as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Write it down and share it in a small-group setting. Pray for one another as you seek authentic discipleship.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Jesus, I do not want to be part of the crowd who is merely caught up in the enthusiasm surrounding you.

-God, show me the people who are going through the motions of following you and help me encourage them in the faith.

-Father, help me to count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus.

-Father, reveal the idols in my heart and help me rid them from my life.