

# The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25-35

## Introduction

**Terms and Conditions:** You know, when you download a computer program, buy a cell phone, or any number of things in the modern world, you have to “read and agree” to the **terms of service**? And we all “read” and agree \*wink\* (they could put whatever they want in there). The PayPal terms and conditions have more words than Shakespeare’s classic *Hamlet*.

- Most companies intentionally use dense legal language and long documents to mitigate risk. There is a recognized psychological tactic called “consent theater” in which users *perform* the action of agreement but are never truly *informed*. They *feel* like they agreed to something, but they don’t know *what* it was. A 2017 survey found that 97% of people aged 18-34 consent without reading the terms.<sup>1</sup>
- I saw a lawyer who actually reads his contracts talk about rental car agreements. When he flies to a city and rents a car, if you turn the paper over, the entire agreement is on the back. It says things like, if you sue, you’ll sue in California, or you won’t drive the car out of the state. He just crosses those things out, initials it, flips it back over, and signs it.<sup>2</sup> 😊 I bet he’s a lot of fun at the Apple store when he reads everything before making a purchase!
- The scary part? What you agree to is legally enforceable.
- How many of us have actually read the “terms of service” for following Christ?

**Crystal Clear:** Jesus doesn’t hide his terms from easy access. He is perfectly, *painfully* clear. He tells us just how great the **cost of discipleship** is.

- This is the opposite of the **devil**, who, like a sneaky timeshare salesman, promises shiny benefits in a full-color brochure, hiding the devastating consequences of sin in obscure terms, in small print, on the back page.<sup>3</sup>

**Anti-Movement:** I suspect that if we didn’t know these words came from Jesus, some of us might be shocked or even disagree with the strategy.

- It’s a strange way to build a movement. We tend to want as big of a movement as possible, which requires as large a crowd as possible, which means it’s counterproductive to say things that will offend, upset, or alienate them.
- We tell them all of the ways they *can* make it in, rather than all of the ways they can’t. All of the rewards, but none of the cost.
- Do we minimize the call of Christ to the lowest common denominator or maximize the worth of surrendering everything to know him?

Following Jesus costs you everything, but gives you more than you could ever lose.

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<sup>1</sup> Deloitte

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/3-a-4L2Au2s?feature=share>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. his “diabolical” strategy in Matt 4, Lk 4, etc.

- Jesus is not discouraging discipleship, he's clarifying it. He's warning against half-hearted, weakly attached followers who will falter at the first sign of discomfort or call to sacrifice.
- Jesus uses a series of statements to sift the "curious from the committed" (Begg). Following Jesus, in so many ways, is an either/or decision.

<sup>25</sup> Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> 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? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> 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? <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. <sup>34</sup> "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? <sup>35</sup> It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

### 1. Kingdom or Kin (vv. 25-26)

<sup>25</sup> Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "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*."

**Crowded Context:** These large crowds have now joined Jesus on his itinerant journey. They've come to him! Everything is going exactly as planned, right? Not necessarily. We've already seen the warning earlier, that the invitation is wide but the point of entry is narrow. Many people "follow" Jesus to see his miracles and hear his teaching, without ever truly surrendering to him.

- <sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup> But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' (Lk 13:26-27). *Proximity* to Jesus does not necessarily equal intimacy, and, therefore, doesn't guarantee salvation. You have to surrender to him. Many people love the show but are unwilling to relinquish control.
- **We love a crowd.** We'll go along with a crowd. A crowd communicates popularity and importance. "A college student was at a large outdoor festival (food trucks, live music, massive crowds). She saw a large group of people excitedly walking in the same direction. She joined in, assuming it was something awesome (free t-shirt, celebrity guest). Five minutes in the sea of people until they arrived... at the porta-potties. It turns out they were heading to the bathroom." Be careful that you know where you're going or you'll follow the crowd and not the Savior.

**Shocking Statement:** <sup>26</sup> “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*.”

- The shock of this statement is meant to jolt us out of the apathy to which we are accustomed. In other gospel accounts, Jesus speaks a little more gently: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, etc.” (Matt 10:37). But here Luke records the more severe warning to shake us loose from nominal or sentimental discipleship.
- In my early years in ministry, I once preached a message on this passage entitled “Why Jesus says to hate your parents.” Unfortunately, a few teenagers were already succeeding in this regard. It is natural for teenagers to think their parents are stupid. “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years” (Twain).<sup>4</sup>
- The idiom Jesus uses here is *comparative*, not literal. The Bible is clear that we are to “honor,” “revere,” and “obey” our parents.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Jesus *rebukes* the Pharisees for using religious tradition to neglect their parents!<sup>6</sup>
  - The **intensity** of your love for Christ should make your love for other good things look like **hate in comparison**.
- Your **allegiance** to Jesus should be so complete that your love of even good things looks like hate in comparison.

**Good vs. Great:** The thing most likely to sabotage your discipleship is not outright rebellion but comfortable compromise. The things most likely to get in the way of your faithfulness are not always temptations to rebellion, but good things you elevate to God things. It is not just (especially!) the “bad” things, but the “good” things that will keep you from Jesus.

- In many ways, it’s much easier to justify half-hearted obedience because of family, comfort, and stability than because of sin, suffering, or doubt.
  - I’ve seen parental fear torpedo a missionary calling. I’ve seen spousal resistance derail a ministry assignment. I’ve seen, more times than I can count, youth sports and the desire to provide childhood memories displace church attendance and discipleship priorities.
- Practically, it’s easy to give your best time, energy, affection, and attention to your family, your job, your relationship, or your ambitions, while offering Jesus only your leftovers.
  - But the truth is this: you can’t be the spouse, parent, employee, or friend God calls you to be until you surrender everything to Jesus.
- Following Jesus may cost you certain relationships, but it gives you the most important one. And without that devotion, you’re not just a distracted disciple, you’re not a disciple at all.

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<sup>4</sup> I graduated high school, college, and PhD pre-ChatGPT.

<sup>5</sup> Ex 20:12, Lev 19:3, Deut 5:16, Eph 6:1, Col 3:20; If we are to “love [our] enemies” (Lk 6:35), certainly we should love our parents.

<sup>6</sup> Matt 15:3-6

**Global, Historical Perspective:** Put yourself in the first-century shoes of the disciples. There was no positive social value to becoming a Christian. Following Jesus was an act of familial treason. There was no option for casual devotion to Jesus.

- For some of us, there is positive social pressure to identify as a Christian. Rather than being shunned, we will be embraced and celebrated.

Around the world, today, following Jesus means being kicked out of your home, alienated from meaningful employment, barred from your community... arrested, beaten, or even killed.

He's asking what you need to leave behind to follow him. Discipleship doesn't just reorder your relationships, it redefines your very life. To what must you die to find true life?

## 2. Cross or Comfort (vv. 27)

<sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me *cannot be my disciple*.

**Self-Love:** We know this isn't *just* about family but about all good things because he says we are to hate even our own life in comparison.<sup>7</sup> The assumption in scripture is that the default position of the human heart is to love yourself (or at least act in our own best interest).<sup>8</sup>

- But true life is found not in living for yourself but in living for Christ.
  - “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (Jn 12:25).
- The key to true life is not loving your life but laying it down.
  - And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Lk 9:23-25).<sup>9</sup>

**Take Up Your Cross:** To bear your cross has been turned by some into a trivial expression—a challenging job, difficult family member, or frustrating medical condition (“my cross to bear”). “In the first century, that sort of [usage] would have been [unthinkable].” The cross was an instrument of torture and execution, of painful and inescapable death. “To take up your cross means you are under sentence of death [and] you have abandoned all hope of life in this world. [Only then] are [you] ready to follow him” (Carson).<sup>10</sup>

- To take up your cross is to take up your instrument of torture and execution. Embrace death!
- Too many people have perverted the truth that God wants you to be happy into the lie that happiness is the absence of suffering. True and lasting happiness can always and only be found in Christ alone.

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<sup>7</sup> See point 1 above.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 2 Tim 3:2, Eph 5:28, Lev 19:18, Phil 2:3

<sup>9</sup> Matt 16:24-26, Mk 8:34-37

<sup>10</sup> *Scandalous*

- No amount of zeroes at the end of your bank account, letters at the end of your name, trophies on your shelf, or followers on your feed will give you the happiness you seek.
- Be careful of anyone who tells you that following Jesus is the path to health or wealth, because that is the opposite of what Jesus himself says.
- “We have to tell people the truth about following Jesus. If you honestly repent and believe, you will be saved, but it will be costly” (Dever).
- “It is much easier a thing to walk an aisle than to take up a cross” (Dever).

**Finding Jesus in Your Suffering:** Suffering brings believers into communion with the suffering Savior. In fact, when we “share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings,” we also “share abundantly in [his] comfort too” (2 Cor 1:5).<sup>11</sup>

- “There is no greater comfort to a Christian than to be made like Christ by patiently suffering adversity, trials, and weakness. Jesus himself suffered pain; he was crucified before entering glory. Truly, our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ. Our door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ so that we may rise again from death and dwell with him in everlasting life. So your weakness, sickness, trials, and pain are profitable for you as they conform you to the image of Christ” (*Book of Common Prayer*, “Visitation for the Sick,” *adapted*).
- My seminary professor once shared a story about a man named Oshe (OH-shay), a faithful local partner in Burji, a remote region in southern Ethiopia near the Kenyan border. Oshe had been instrumental in planting churches, distributing Christian materials, and installing solar-powered systems to broadcast the gospel in surrounding villages, mostly Muslim communities. **His work made him a target.** First, someone ran over and killed his livestock. Then, tragically, that same driver ran over and killed Oshe’s four-year-old daughter. She was the second martyr of their ministry in Burji—the first being James, a young translator who had been murdered by a neighboring tribe for helping the mission. My professor asked the raw and honest question of God, “Lord, is this the price of building your church in Ethiopia?” And yet, in that question, he was reminded of the suffering Savior, of the cross. In that location, it’s evident: following Jesus will cost you. But as Scripture reminds us: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11). Suffering doesn’t contradict discipleship, it confirms it. A Christian without suffering is an oxymoron, as meaningless as a Christ without a cross. A Christian without a cross is no Christian at all.
- Do you want to know Jesus? “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil 3:10).

**Courageous Call:** There is nothing passive about carrying a cross. There’s nothing soft about surrender. To follow Jesus is not to join a fan club. We don’t simply take up some ideas or some morals, but a cross. While we don’t seek suffering, we do embrace it.

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<sup>11</sup> HT *ESV Gospel Transformation Bible*, cf. Phil 1:29; Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 4:13

- There is nothing self-indulgent about being a disciple. Some people act like Christianity is for the weak. It's a crutch for the simple-minded. All of us are weak and in need of grace, but I think **following Jesus is the most courageous thing you can do.**
- If you're simply here for the miracles, the clever teaching, the crowd, or the spectacle, then be careful, you might be around Jesus but not with him.
- They're "literally" following but have yet to "truly" follow. They've admired his power but haven't surrendered to his rule. They've gathered in his presence but haven't given him their allegiance.
- Jesus isn't walking toward popularity but to the cross, and he's inviting you to come with him. Not because it's easy, but because it's worth it, because wherever he is, even in suffering, that's where true life is found.

But Jesus isn't just warning you that following him is costly; he's asking you to stop and count the cost. This isn't a bait-and-switch. This is a clear-eyed invitation to lay down your life and follow him, knowing full well what it will take.

### 3. Costly or Cheap (vv. 28-32)

<sup>28</sup> 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? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> 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?<sup>12</sup> <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

**Count the Cost:** Jesus asks two rhetorical questions with self-explanatory answers to illustrate the simple point: "The desire to come to Jesus is a good one, but it is not to be considered casually" (Bock).

- I read a story about a new Skyscraper set to adorn Manhattan's Financial District. A 60 story tower poised to be a luxury icon. But financial problems motivated corner-cutting, which led to foundation issues and ultimately safety problems and legal disputes. Now, with the financing dried up, the building continues to sit vacant, an unfinished shell. It's a visible reminder: starting big with enthusiasm isn't enough; you have to count the cost.

**Cheap Grace:** We have confused the freeness of grace for the cheapness of grace. "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church

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<sup>12</sup> In Luke 14:31, Jesus contrasts an army of δέκα χιλιάσιν ("ten thousands") with εἴκοσι χιλιάδων ("twenty thousands"), using concrete, countable terms to underscore a realistic military mismatch. This differs from the use of μυρίοι and its plural forms (μυριάδες μυριάδων, "myriads of myriads") elsewhere in the New Testament, such as in Revelation 5:11 or the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:24, μυρίων ταλάντων, "ten thousand talents"). In those contexts, μυρίοι functions as a symbolic or metaphorical shorthand for an innumerable quantity—essentially a "bajillion"—emphasizing overwhelming scale rather than precise countability. The contrast highlights how Luke 14 appeals to sober consideration and practical wisdom, not exaggerated hyperbole.

discipline... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross... Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl for which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy... Such grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son, and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not consider his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us" (Bonhoeffer).

**Worth It:** If knowing Jesus is not worth the cost, you won't pay the price. Is Jesus worth it to you? If it costs you a relationship? A dream? A habit? A lifestyle? A reputation? Control?

Counting the cost demands that you pay it. The decision to follow Jesus is not a calculation of minimal effort but a surrender of total allegiance. Following Jesus demands everything.

#### 4. All or Nothing (vv. 33)

<sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.<sup>13</sup>

**Choice:** You have a choice to make, to renounce, to willingly give up, set aside, say farewell to your "stuff" so you can take hold of Christ.

- You can't have your way and Christ's at the same time.

**Let It Go:** Imagine you are gifted a once-in-a-lifetime vacation at a tropical paradise. All-inclusive, beachside villa, with views of the crystal blue sea, a full staff to make your stay comfortable. Five-star meals, guided excursions, and more. They even purchase a first-class ticket to get you there.

- You get to the gate (the happiest place on earth) and the gate agent tells you that your carry-on bags are too big. You try to squeeze them into the little metal basket, and they are undeniably oversized. You can pitch a fit and whine and complain, but the fact is in front of you, you're not getting on that flight unless you leave your bag behind.
- This is what it's like following Jesus. You can't carry all your stuff with you. You must let go of your possessions, your need for control, your grip on comfort, your idols of security, your addiction to material possessions, and your dependence on approval.
- Jesus is not calling us to be paupers or hermits, necessarily, but he's calling us to surrender *everything* (family, money, dreams), not because those things are bad, but because they can't sit on the throne of our hearts.

Until you let go of the things keeping you from life in Christ, you will be spiritually ineffective. When you cling to the things of this world, you are useless for the cause of Christ.

#### 5. Useful or Useless (vv. 34-35)

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<sup>13</sup> So therefore (οὕτως οὖν) any [one] of you (πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν) who does not renounce (ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται) all [his possessions] (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν) [is] not able to be my disciple (οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής).

<sup>34</sup> “Salt<sup>14</sup> is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? <sup>35</sup> It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**Result:** The result of a half-hearted response is a person who may claim Christ but does not truly know him. And without true surrender, they are useless for the Kingdom of God.

- Jesus is not calling us to a life of empty tradition, but to a life of sacrificial devotion.
- And let’s be honest: the lowest common denominator approach to Christianity is not working.
- We say we’re people of “truth,” yet we often deceive others by soft-selling the gospel. We highlight all the benefits and hide the costs. But Jesus never did that.
- Here’s the truth: if you follow Jesus, you will be the happiest, most peaceful, most deeply contented you’ve ever been, but not because your life will get easier. In fact, your suffering may increase. Your joy won’t come from comfort or the removal of pain, but from your restored relationship with God.

**Reality:** There are people who think they are converted and are not. Famed 19th-century London preacher, Charles Spurgeon, was walking down the street one day when a drunkman yelled to him, “Mr. Spurgeon, do you remember me? I’m one of your converts.” To which Spurgeon responded, “You must be one of mine; you’re certainly not one of the Lord’s.”<sup>15</sup>

- “I fear... that evangelical churches are full of people who have made sincere commitments at some point in their lives but have never experienced the radical change that the Bible” describes of a follower of Jesus (Dever)
- That’s why we want to hold the line on the idea that the gospel is not an addition to my already established priorities to make my life better, but a complete reorientation of my entire life around Jesus.

**True Desire:** That’s what people truly want. They want the power and presence of Christ. They want to be useful for the kingdom. They want to give their lives for something of eternal value.

- At the height of fame and fortune, C.T. Studd had everything the world celebrates. Born into wealth, he became one of England’s greatest cricket players, an international sports hero. But after encountering the gospel of Jesus Christ, he realized that all the trophies in the world couldn’t compare to knowing and serving Christ. When his wealthy father died, Studd inherited what would be equivalent to millions today. And he gave it all away to various mission causes. And then he left everything familiar to take the gospel to China, then India, and eventually the heart of Africa. He lived as a missionary, trusting God to provide. He once wrote: “Only one life, ’twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ will last.” He believed it. And he lived it. He died in Congo at the age of 70, poor in possessions, but rich in the only thing that matters.

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<sup>14</sup> οὐ̅ν connects 34 to 33 (e.g., therefore, now). Untranslated in ESV, NIV, NRSV, NLT, RSV and omitted in mss of the KJV, NKJV, AV

<sup>15</sup> HT Dever

## Conclusion

Following Jesus costs you everything, but gives you more than you could ever lose.

- Lay it all down. Complete surrender. That's the invitation.
- You might be scared. **That's okay**. But faith isn't the absence of fear; it's trusting that *His* way is better. And it is. **Costly?** Absolutely, but totally worth it.
- Every hard step on the narrow road is worth it because it brings you closer to the One you were made for. You walk the road *with* him.
- You were created to know him, and nothing else you chase will satisfy. He came to give you life, abundant life, real life, a life worth living.<sup>16</sup> To give you that life, he laid down his own!
- Paul says in Phil 3, that everything, good or bad, is a "loss" compared to "surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus," even if he must "[suffer] the loss of all things," it is worth it to gain Christ (Phil 3:8).
  - Because he is the treasure of infinite and eternal value. Everything you "lose" is nothing compared to the one you gain.
- What do you need to let go of in order to take hold of Christ? What are you holding onto that's keeping you from holding onto Jesus? Will you lay it down?

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<sup>16</sup> Jn 10:10