

**The Cost of Discipleship**  
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We are in a sermon series called Forward in Faith. In this series we are using the word FORWARD as an acrostic. Follow – Obey – Resist – Worship – Abide – Reach – Disciple. These are the actions we must take to move forward in discipleship.

For the past few weeks we've taught on what it means to FOLLOW. Once we are born again, we begin a life-long process of following Christ called discipleship.

We've learned that a disciple is a student who learns from another. Secondly, a disciple is a follower who follows another so that they may become like them. Remember there's a difference between being a **believer and a disciple**. Believers are saved and going to heaven, but many believers never become disciples because they never progress beyond infancy.

Last week, we learned 7 reasons why discipleship is necessary according to the Bible.

1. The first reason for discipleship is obedience.
2. Discipleship is necessary because Jesus made disciples
3. The purpose of discipleship is to know God
4. Discipleship is necessary because other people need to know God
- 5- Discipleship is necessary to empower the next generation of leaders
6. The purpose of discipleship is to grow to spiritual maturity
- 7- The purpose of discipleship is to help others grow to spiritual maturity

Today I'm preaching on The Cost of Discipleship. Salvation is free and you can pay no price to earn it. But over and over in the Bible, Jesus urged His followers to count the cost of following Him.

Throughout the history of America, it has been relatively easy to be a follower of Christ. But that's not been the case throughout world history. The world has been a difficult and deadly place for those who are serious about following Christ.

- Since the death of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, 43 million Christians have become martyrs who died for their faith
- Every day over 300 people are killed for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Somewhere along the way we became convinced in this country that Christianity is 'easy.' All you have to do is ask Jesus into your heart, read your Bible from time to time, go to church occasionally, say a few prayers and you're good to go. You can go on living however you want to live, you can do it "your way", still get to heaven, and all would be good. But is that what Jesus meant when He said follow Me?

Remember, not everyone who goes to church is a disciple. In fact, Jesus distinguishes between a crowd and a disciple in Matthew 8:18.

*When Jesus noticed how large the crowd was growing, He instructed His disciples to cross to the other side of the lake.*

There are crowds and then there are disciples. How do you know the difference?

Wherever Jesus went, crowds followed Him. Most were there for the spectacle. They saw sick people healed and demons cast out. Some were there for the food Jesus provided.

Basically, the crowd was there for what they could get from Jesus. But a disciple also wants to give to Jesus.

The crowd was there because of what Jesus could do for them. But a disciple wants to know what they can do for Jesus.

The crowd wants to listen to Jesus, but a disciple wants to become like Jesus. The crowd wants Jesus to bless them, but a disciple also wants to be a blessing to Jesus.

The crowd does not want to pay a price, but a disciple will pay any price to follow Jesus.

Today we are going to see how Jesus defined a true disciple. There are many verses that reveal what Jesus expected of true disciples. Times when Jesus said, "You must do this to be my disciple. Or, you cannot do that and be my disciple."

These expectations have not changed! They are the same expectations He has for His followers today. Those verses show us the cost of discipleship.

### **1- To be a disciple, you must count the cost before you follow Christ**

Salvation is free – but discipleship is costly. So Jesus tells us to count the cost before following Him. He said in Luke 14:27-30

*If you do not carry your own cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple. But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first counting the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'*

Jesus is very clear that there is a cost to follow Him. Some of that cost is the same for all of us. But each of us has individual costs that we must be willing to pay. For example – with the rich young ruler it was giving away money.

Matthew 8:18-20 tells some other costs to count:

*When Jesus noticed how large the crowd was growing, He instructed His disciples to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to Him and said, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."*

It's interesting that this man told Jesus he wanted to follow Him. But Jesus didn't just welcome him with open arms. Instead, Jesus tells him to count the cost. Jesus was basically saying to this man, "We're on the road most of the time. We're not staying at the Jerusalem Hilton or the Galilee Beachfront Resort or the Jordan River Luxury Spa. In fact, we sleep outside on the ground sometimes. Oh, and also, we touch lepers and deal with demon-possessed people. And by the way – I'll end up on a cross in Jerusalem. If you follow Me, you will be ridiculed and persecuted for it. Are you sure you want to follow Me?"

Following Jesus as a disciple comes at a cost. It involves sacrifice. No servant is above His Master. If Jesus was rejected and harassed and criticized, the followers of Christ should expect no better treatment.

To be a disciple of Christ means you must be willing to sacrifice many of the pleasures of this world. Are you willing to pay the price?

While the first man in Matthew 8 was over eager to follow Christ – the next man was under eager. Matthew 8:21-22 says:

*Another disciple came to Jesus and said, "I want to follow You, but first let me go bury My father."*

Sounds reasonable.

*Jesus told him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Sounds kind of harsh. But here's what Jesus is saying:

## **2- To be a disciple, you must instantly obey the Lord**

Now, it sounds harsh when Jesus told the man to follow Him and let the dead bury the dead. But we must remember that in Eastern cultures, the dead were buried within the first 24 hours. What is most likely here is that this man's father was not dead yet. Certainly Jesus could have waited a few hours or a day.

Dr. Adam Smith was an authority on Middle Eastern culture. He went to a village and wanted to hire an Arab guide. He was told of an excellent guide, but when he found him, the young man said, "I first have to bury my father." And there, in front of the hut, sat his elderly father, alive and well. What the young man meant was, "I must care for my father until he dies."

Whatever it meant, the young man in Matthew was saying, “Jesus, I want to follow you... someday.” The response given by Jesus indicates that when He calls us to follow, He expects us to obey without delay and without excuse!

And people today find many excuses for not whole-heartedly following Christ today. They have good intentions to obey someday, but someday never comes.

First they have to finish school.

Then they have to find a job- then they must concentrate on their career.

Then they get married and then a family.

Then the kids have sports and school and band and a zillion other things.

Then the kids are grown and they have to prepare for retirement.

The list goes on and on, but Jesus wants to cut through our excuses and challenge us to put Him first now, not later!

### **3- To be a disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross**

Matthew 16:24 says:

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying, also].*

You don't hear much about dying for Christ or even dying to self today. Most people don't like to talk about the cost of following Christ. They just want to reap the benefits.

Most people live life based on their own thoughts or feelings. As Christians we must die to that and live by God's will and God's word. Self-denial is not denying yourself things – it is denying yourself. That means saying no to yourself and yes to God.

It's human nature to live for yourself, but Christ died to free you from the bondage of living for yourself so you can live for God. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says:

*He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

We must die to self in order to live for God. That requires a lifestyle of repentance where we continually turn from sin and self to God. When a Christian sins, the Holy Spirit will convict him of his sin. At that point, we face a choice – my way or God's way? Dying to self means saying “No” to self and “Yes” to God. You must daily take up your cross and follow Him.

What does it mean to take the cross? It does not mean you must put up with sickness or some tragic or tough situation in life – such as “My mother-in-law is

my cross to bear.” It means that we submit to God from our heart. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed to the Father, “Not my will but Yours,” then He went forth to take the cross.

Therefore, to take the cross is to choose to do God's will above our own. Being a disciple requires daily taking up our cross and dying to self.

#### **4- To be a disciple you must put Christ before everyone else**

In Luke 14:26-27 Jesus said:

*If you want to be My disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.*

Now – we know Jesus teaches us to love and not to hate. What He is saying here is that your love for God must be greater than your love for anyone else, including your family or yourself!

Jesus never wants us to neglect our families, but neither does He want us to put family before Him! There will come a time in your life when someone you love will not love Jesus. They may even attack you because of your relationship with Christ. At that point you must decide who is more important to you. Will you sacrifice your commitment to family or friends for the sake of Christ – or will you sacrifice your relationship with God because of friends or family? Jesus said it this way in Matthew 10:37

*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

Being a disciple requires putting Jesus before people, but also:

#### **5- To be a disciple you must put Christ before everything else**

Luke 14:33 says:

*In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple.*

This does not mean you have to give everything away. It doesn't mean that you can't own anything. But it does mean that things cannot own you. Jesus owns you and you must be willing to give up anything He asks. This is different for every person.

God is not happy being in the top 10 of your priorities.

He wants to be first, before your family, before your job, before yourself!

### **6- To be a disciple you must abide in God's word**

In John 8:31-32, Jesus said:

*If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

I'm not going to preach on this today because we'll preach on it later. I just want to say that true disciples live in the word and the word lives in them. They read the word, believe the word, memorize the word, meditate on the word, pray the word and do spiritual warfare with the word. They are doers of the word, not hearers only!

### **7- To be a disciple, you must love other people**

In John 13:35 Jesus said,

*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

This is a sobering verse. People will know we are followers of Christ when we love one another. God's Word says that the world will know we are Christians:

Not by our Church attendance;

Not by our Bible knowledge;

Not by our giving;

Not by our worship or by our praying.

All those things are important and have their place in the Christian life.

But Jesus says that there is one quality that overrides them all: LOVE!

Love for other believers is the mark of a true Christian. It's not the sign of the fish bumper stickers on our car or the cross hanging around our neck. Those things are okay, but the true mark of a true Christian is love.

Almost 100% of people believe Jesus was good and loving. If they don't see us living and loving like Him, they don't believe we are His followers. This is why relationships are so important to evangelism.

### **8- To be a disciple, you must abide in the Vine and bear much fruit**

Jesus said in John 15:7-8

*If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.*

Jesus expects His disciples to bear fruit – much fruit. What is that fruit?  
Fruit is seen in our character, our conduct and our converts.

Abiding in Christ grows the fruit of the spirit in our lives.  
Following Christ changes us into His image in the way we live.  
Sharing Christ with others leads to a harvest of souls being saved.

These are 8 ways discipleship costs us. Some people don't like it when they discover that following Christ requires complete commitment. They say things like:

I believe in Jesus, but I'll pick and choose how I will follow Him.  
I'll follow Jesus until He tells me to forgive that person who hurt me.  
I'll follow Jesus, but don't talk to me about giving my money.  
I'll follow Jesus, but don't tell me I have to abstain from sex outside of marriage.  
I'm a fan of Jesus because I think He can change my circumstances, but don't ask me for any kind of sacrifice.  
I'm here to receive, not give.

The point is this: Following Jesus is costly. You can't buy salvation with anything – but discipleship will cost you everything! Yet for some of us – any cost is too much.

Too many people want a no-cost Christianity. They want cheap grace.  
They want cut-rate commitment. They want a bargain-basement belief.  
They want a thrift-store theology. They want a marked-down Messiah.  
They want a second-rate super-cheap salvation.  
They want to pay the absolutely lowest rock-bottom clearance-rack price.  
But Jesus is the King and He's looking for those who will submit to His Lordship.  
There's no bargaining or bartering with the King.

So, you've heard the COST of following Jesus. Are you willing to pay the price?  
You might say, "The cost is too high."  
But I urge you to consider the cost of NOT following Him!

Following Jesus means you have His presence wherever you go.  
Not following Jesus means you're on your own.

Following Jesus gives purpose to life.  
Not following Jesus leaves you purposeless.  
Following Jesus ends in eternal life.  
Not following Jesus ends without eternal life.  
Following Jesus ends in heaven. Not following Jesus ends in hell.

You see, there's a cost either way.  
I submit to you today that the cost of not following Jesus far outweighs the cost of following Him!  
Are you willing to count the cost?