



Unit .23

Session .02

Jesus Teaches About the Cost of Discipleship

Scripture



Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35

57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” **58** Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” **59** Then he said to another, “Follow me.” “Lord,” he said, “first let me go bury my father.” **60** But he told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.” **61** Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.” **62** But Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” ... **25** Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them: **26** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, 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, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, **30** saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ **31** “Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple. **34** “Now, salt is good, but if salt should lose its taste, how will it be made salty? **35** It isn’t fit for the soil or for the manure pile; they throw it out. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

Intro Options



Main Point:
Discipleship involves
a total and costly
commitment to
following Jesus.

Option 1

In this session we come to see that discipleship requires a commitment that has been carefully weighed and considered, one that reaches into every inch of our lives and radically transforms us. Jesus requires obedience even when it isn't trendy; He requires obedience even when it costs. The cost for some of His listeners would be much higher than losing some social capital or cool points. Their commitment to Him could cause a loss of livelihood, family connections, and, for some, their lives. If they were invested in following Jesus for the wrong reasons, their half-baked motives would be revealed the moment they saw their beloved Rabbi hanging on a cross.

▪ What are some costs of following Jesus we might face today as Christians?

It is easy to judge Jesus' disciples for their shaky commitment to Him, but how often have we wavered in our commitment even when our lives are not at stake? This requirement for total commitment is not easy, but it is what we've been called to, and Jesus stands ready and able to help us to answer that call.

Option 2

Tell the students you're going to play a short game called, "What Would It Take?" You're going to give students scenarios; their job is to say what it would take for them to enter those scenarios willingly. For example, what would it take for your students to:

- Give up interactive technology (phones, computers, gaming consoles) for one month?
- Give up speaking for one week?
- Stay in one room for a month? A year?

See what answers students give. Then, give students some time to come up with their own "What Would It Take?" scenarios. Ask those new scenarios to the students. Point out that in order for someone to make a commitment, he or she needs to know the cost and the benefit; moreover, he or she considers the benefit to be worth the cost. For the "What Would It Take" scenarios, your students probably came up with some big benefits.

In today's lesson, Jesus is going to show that being His discipleship requires a clear, total, and costly commitment. Yet we will also see that it's a very worthwhile commitment. What would it take for you to be Jesus' disciple?

TEACHING PLAN

Read Luke 9:57-62.




In this passage, Jesus illustrates to those who wish to follow Him that a verbal claim of His lordship in their lives is not enough. Rather than collecting as many followers as possible to build His Instagram empire, Jesus is actually concerned with the real, heart-deep commitment of His listeners, commitment that leads to true transformation.

Each time someone came to Jesus and pledged to follow Him, Jesus tested their commitment by communicating to them exactly what they were signing up for. They would be living a nomadic lifestyle on their way to Jerusalem. They would have to miss important events in the lives of their families and communities because of their responsibilities to Christ. They would have to look forward without turning back.

Jesus was not in the business of sugar-coating the disciples' commitment. He wanted to be abundantly clear: following Him would be the hardest thing they would ever have done. It would make them face fears they never imagined, it would take them into places they never envisioned, and it would ask of them things that they never thought they'd have to give. He wanted to make sure that those who were clinging to Him weren't just in it for the cool miracles or abundance of loaves and fishes. Jesus wanted to remind them that following Him wasn't just something that they could say—it included things that they must do.

▪ How should our verbal commitment to follow Jesus lead to action?

All three men who claimed to want to follow Jesus in this passage had their hang-ups. Jesus saw that one man needed to hear about how following Him might lead to not even having a place to lay his head. Jesus told another that obedience to His call needed to be immediate, even at the expense of the man burying his father (likely a euphemism for waiting for his father to die so that he might receive his inheritance). He told the third person that following Him meant no turning back, not even to say goodbye to his loved ones.

In order to follow Jesus, these three men had to put Him above all else: comfort, wealth, and family. The people mentioned in this account couldn't choose following Jesus and earthly comfort, following Jesus and earthly wealth, or following Jesus and family—it was Jesus or everything else. This was not a casual commitment, but a life-altering one, and they needed to be clear on the terms before signing on the dotted line. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to be clear that following Him means putting Him above all else. Prioritizing Him rightly is the first step to understanding exactly what we're signing up for. 

▪ How has following Jesus altered your priorities?

Read Luke 14:25-27.



The command to honor fathers and mothers is one that Jesus reiterated during His earthly ministry. In Matthew 15:3-9, He rebuked the scribes for commanding that people give money to the temple instead of caring for their parents with the same funds. He told the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 that honoring his father and mother is one of the laws that he must follow to enter the kingdom.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Luke 9

57-62. “Along the way, Jesus spelt out the cost of discipleship to three would-be disciples who expressed their desire to follow him. He warned the first that, contrary to what many might think, Jesus’ way of life was rough (see Matt. 8:19-22). He endured rejection and homelessness, and so would his followers (9:57-58). To the second, Jesus said that no other duty, even waiting to bury a deceased father, is as important and urgent as the commitment to follow Jesus and preach the kingdom of God (9:59-60). To the third, Jesus replied that once a person has decided to follow Jesus, there can be no turning back from his service (9:61-62). In all three cases, Jesus’ responses spoke of absolute commitment to him. Christians today are still called to follow him with single-minded devotion.”¹

Luke 14

25-27. Our God is not the author of contradiction or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), so we must surmise that Jesus is not asking us to dishonor our father and mother after centuries of commanding us to honor them. He knew the seriousness of the Fifth Commandment; He lived out this seriousness Himself in His earthly life, obeying His earthly parents as a youth (Luke 2:51) and following His heavenly Father’s decree by dying on a cross (Phil. 2:5-9). Not only that, but the apostle Paul spends a great deal of space in passages such as Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1 outlining exactly how the other relationships Jesus mentions in this passage—husbands and wives, parents and children—should be conducted. Large chunks of the epistles, which are just as God-breathed as Jesus’ words recorded in the Gospels, are devoted to teaching us how to be faithful in our earthly relationships, both familial and spiritual.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

Discipleship

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God’s Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

TEACHING PLAN

It should be apparent to us, then, that Jesus used hyperbole in this passage to drive home an important point: our allegiance to Him is so complete that it should even surpass our allegiance to our earthly parents. We should strive to love and respect our earthly relations to the best of our abilities. Yet our love and respect for Jesus should so far outweigh our love toward any other that this respect in turn looks like hatred on comparison. This is radical, yes. And that is exactly the point Jesus is making: our love for Him should be radical.

- **How does your love for Jesus affect and surpass your love for your earthly relationships?**

Read Luke 14:28-35.



In Jesus' illustration, a man set out to build a tower without calculating how much the project would cost. After the foundation was laid he ran out of funds and was completely embarrassed by onlookers who had been watching the project from the start.

In the same way, Jesus is telling His listeners that following Him isn't just something we should wake up one sunny day and decide to do without first stopping to count the cost. It isn't something that we can do halfheartedly; like building the foundation of a huge tower, it isn't something we can just abandon halfway through. To take up our cross and follow Jesus is a lifelong endeavor with eternal significance.

- **What might giving Jesus our total commitment look like at this point in your life?**

Every culture has some notion of a senseless war somewhere in its history. Jesus took this notion and used it to describe the kind of king who avoids unnecessary bloodshed and inevitable defeat by using his common sense to reason his way toward another solution. Following Jesus is not a ploy for earthly renown because to truly follow Jesus is to deny personal glory for ourselves for the eternal glorification of God.

In verses 34-35, Jesus reminds His listeners that His disciples were expected to be salt and light. As we've discussed, our job is to spread the message of the gospel to a dying world, not to become like the world. Our battle is not glorious to those with earthly eyes. Nevertheless, our calculated effort to follow Jesus reflects the glory of our Father in heaven.

- **Why should we reflect on the level of our commitment to Jesus throughout our Christian life? How might doing so encourage us to make our commitment to Him stronger?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:

Discipleship involves a total and costly commitment to following Jesus.

Luke 14

25-27. When Paul teaches husbands how they ought to love their wives in Ephesians, he teaches them that they should love their wives as much as they love their own flesh (Eph. 5:29). When asked what the most important commandment is, Paul's teacher, Jesus, reminds us that the second most important commandment is that we should love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:39).

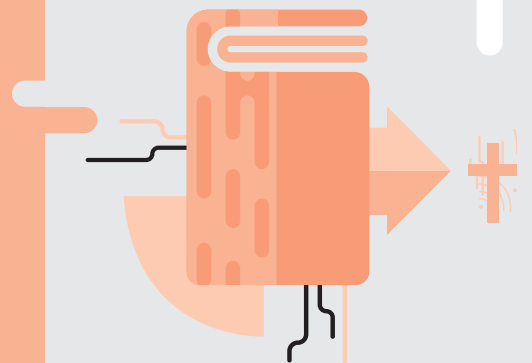
We are, by nature, preservers of self. However, Jesus' words in this passage fly in the face of self-protection. He has already told us that our love for Him must surpass our love for other people, and, as we've already discussed, that feels like a radical departure from other biblical commandments. Now He appears to be departing from the assumption buried deep within His other commandments, that we should care for ourselves.

Instead of reiterating the call toward self-preservation, Jesus teaches the opposite: we should take up our crosses when we follow Him, prepared to follow Him all the way to Calvary. We should love our neighbors, we should love ourselves, and we should love Jesus so much that our love for ourselves looks like hatred in comparison. We should come to Christ as if we have already died because our lives belong completely to Him.

28-35. "Two parabolic illustrations involving building (vv. 28-30) and going to war (vv. 31-32) both warn against making a hasty decision to follow Jesus. Potential disciples must first count the cost to see if they will persevere in the faith (cf. 8:15; 21:19) ... if salt has lost its taste. Most salt came from the Dead Sea and contained impurities (carnallite and gypsum). If not processed properly, it would have a poor taste and would be worse than useless, being unusable for food and creating a disposal problem. If the conditions of discipleship (vv. 26-27,33) are not kept, the disciples likewise will become less than worthless (cf. Rev. 3:15-17)."²

(p. 50, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus taught that being His disciple comes at a cost. To be His disciple requires a clear and total commitment and will involve sacrifice. When we commit our entire lives to Jesus as His disciples, we emulate the One who laid down His life on our behalf for our salvation.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What can we learn from Jesus' example when it comes to giving our all to God?

How is the reward we gain from knowing Jesus greater than any earthly reward we give up in order to follow Him?

Heart



How does a commitment to follow Jesus begin with the heart?

What can we do if we find our hearts more in love with the things of this world than with following after Jesus?

Hands



What are some areas in your life that are holding you back from a whole-hearted commitment to following Jesus?

How can our full commitment to following Jesus help us serve others in their need of knowing Him?

Main Point: Discipleship involves a total and costly commitment to following Jesus.



Head

Jesus was not here on earth collecting followers just for numbers' sake. He was interested in having followers who knew exactly what they were signing up for. He still is. Counting the cost of discipleship is an important step in making a commitment to Christ. Half-hearted commitment is not a mark of Jesus' people, nor is a wishy-washy understanding. Following Jesus doesn't just cost us a lot: it will cost us everything.

Jesus Himself is our example in laying down His life for God's glory. He came to earth and lived completely undeserving of the death that awaited Him, but He laid down that life for our sake. He died a gruesome death so that we might know a reward that we did not deserve. It is this reward that makes the cost of discipleship infinitely worth it. Jesus reminds us that He is completely deserving of the sacrifice that He is requiring us—and that He will return it to us one hundredfold.



Heart

At the end of the day, Jesus' concern wasn't about amassing lukewarm followers for show. Instead of getting followers with the promise of earthly benefits, He pressed them to walk away unless they were truly willing to count the cost before coming to Him. He is abundantly clear about the cost; there are no hidden fees. But the decision to embrace whatever cost to follow Jesus starts with the heart. Are our hearts willing to let go of the things of this world and give God our all? Are our hearts so captivated by the glory of God that they are willing to deny being captivated by all the world has to offer? Discipleship involves a personal commitment to follow Jesus, but that commitment must begin with a heart that truly loves and desires Him above all else.



Hands

Jesus warned His listeners that following Him is not just a passive decision, but an active assessment of everything that we're willing to give up for Him. The cost of following Him is incalculable because following Him will cost us our entire lives. If we are not willing to part with the things most precious to us and put Jesus in the top spot of our lives, then we need not apply to become His disciples. If we come to the table trying to hedge and negotiate—trying to give just a little less than our all—then we do not belong at the table at all. Because Jesus sacrificed His life on our behalf to provide our salvation, we seek to commit our time, resources, and energy for the work of sharing Christ with others so they too might be saved.