

Jesus Teaches About the Cost of Discipleship

Summary and Goal

In this session, we will learn about how our commitment to discipleship needs to start on the inside: with a heart and a mind that clearly understand that Jesus requires total submission from us and that submission is costly. It is no light thing to commit our lives to Christ; it isn't something we can do halfway. But if we understand the immeasurable worth of Jesus' commitment toward His disciples, we will be motivated to submit ourselves fully to Him.

Session Outline

1. Being Jesus' disciple requires a clear commitment (Luke 9:57-62).
2. Being Jesus' disciple requires a total commitment (Luke 14:25-27).
3. Being Jesus' disciple requires a costly commitment (Luke 14:28-35).

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

Session in a Sentence

Jesus shared that discipleship involves a clear, total, and costly commitment to following Him.

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.

Missional Application

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.

Group Time

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraphs in the DDG (p. 57) to discuss the world's impression of disciples and Jesus' expectations of His disciples.

Despite the growing intolerance of Western society, we still live in a time when, compared to other places in the world, it is incredibly advantageous to be a Christian, at least to a point. Being a member at your local church (even if you only go on special holidays), donating to your favorite Christian charity of choice (as long as it isn't a pro-life charity), and being a generally moral person (as long as your morality doesn't infringe on anyone else's choices) are all things that modern American people claim to love.

But Jesus requires an obedience without parenthetical conditions—a true and radical commitment. He requires obedience when it isn't trendy and even when it costs. Our commitment to Him could cause a loss of livelihood, familial connections, and eventually our lives.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 How would you describe the world's impression of disciples of Jesus Christ? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: Jesus' requirement for total commitment is not an easy task, but it is the task that we've been called to, and Jesus stands ready and able to help us answer that call.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will learn about how our commitment to discipleship needs to start on the inside: with a heart and a mind that clearly understand that Jesus requires total submission from us and that submission is costly. It is no light thing to commit our lives to Christ; it isn't something we can do halfway. But if we understand the immeasurable worth of Jesus' commitment toward His disciples, we will be motivated to submit ourselves fully to Him.

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Point 1: Being Jesus' disciple requires a clear commitment (Luke 9:57-62).

READ Luke 9:57-62 (DDG p. 58).

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 58) to establish that Jesus doesn't sugar-coat His expectations of His disciples because He is concerned with real, heart-deep commitment.

Whatever their salvation experience, there was a moment when every believer made a clear, verbal commitment to Christ, saying "I have decided to follow Jesus" in one form or another. But in this passage, Jesus communicates that verbal assent to His lordship is not enough, and He doesn't sugar-coat His expectations of His disciples. He wasn't concerned about amassing lukewarm followers for show. He is concerned with the real, heart-deep commitment of His listeners that will lead 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. Instead of wooing these men with the promise of earthly benefits and cost-effective glory, He pressed them to walk away unless they were truly committed to following Him.
- Jesus is not in the business of sugar-coating His expectations of His disciples. He wants to be abundantly clear: following Him will be the hardest thing they will ever have to do. It will make them face fears they never imagined, it will press them into spaces they never envisioned, and it will require of them things that they never thought they'd have to give. He wants to make sure that those who are clinging to Him aren't in it just for the cool miracles or abundance of loaves and fishes but rather that they realize that the crown they are signing up for is not earthly renown. Jesus wants to remind His disciples that following Him isn't just something they can *say*—it includes things they must *do*.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What were some of your expectations of Christian discipleship when you became a believer? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 58) to highlight that following Jesus means putting Him above all else, including **comfort, duty, wealth, and family**.

Three men claimed to want to follow Jesus in this passage, but all three had their hang-ups because they had to put Him above all else, including **comfort, duty, wealth, and family**. They couldn't choose following Jesus *and* earthly comfort, following Jesus *and* earthly duty or wealth, 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 completely clear on the terms before signing on the dotted line.

- **Comfort:** Jesus saw that one man needed to hear about how following Him might lead to a nomadic lifestyle, without even having a place to lay his head.
 - **Duty and wealth:** Jesus told another that obedience to His call needs to be immediate, even at the expense of the man burying his father, which was possibly a euphemism for waiting for his father to die so that he might receive his inheritance.¹
 - **Family:** Jesus told the third person that following Him means no turning back, not even to say good-bye to loved ones. Disciples may have to miss important events in the lives of their families and communities because of their commitment to Christ.
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SAY: If we want to follow Jesus, we have to be clear that following Him means putting Him above all else. The process of discipleship works to accomplish this reordering of priorities in our lives.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 58).

Discipleship is a **process** that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual **maturity** as people follow Jesus. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole **life**, not just the mind.

Essential Doctrine “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).

Point 2: Being Jesus' disciple requires a total commitment (Luke 14:25-27).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Luke 14:25-27 (DDG p. 59).

²⁵ Now 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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 59) to comment on Jesus' striking statement in this passage and what it means for our earthly relationships with others.

It should be apparent to us that Jesus is using startling words in this passage to drive home an important point: Our allegiance to Jesus must be so complete that it should even surpass our allegiance to our earthly family. In obedience to God's commands, we should strive to love and respect our earthly relations to the best of our ability. Yet our commitment to Jesus should so far outweigh our commitment toward any other person that it would make our love for others look like *hatred* in comparison. This is radical, and that is exactly the point Jesus is making: Our love for Him should be radical.

- The Fifth Commandment—the first that comes with a promise (Eph. 6:2)—is about the very first earthly relationship we will ever have: **honor your father and mother** (Ex. 20:12). Jesus reinforced this commandment often during His earthly ministry
 - In Matthew 15:3-9, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for commanding that people give money to the temple instead of caring for their parents with those funds.
 - In Matthew 19:16-19, Jesus told a questioner that honoring father and mother is one of the commandments necessary to obey for eternal life.
 - In John 19:26-27, Jesus cared for His own mother and secured provision for her even as He was dying on the cross.
- Our God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), so we must surmise that Jesus is not asking us to dishonor our father and mother. What He is doing here is reminding us of the priority of God, and His Son, in our lives. When asked what the most important commandment is, Jesus said that the *second* most important commandment is to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:39), but the *first* commandment is to love the Lord our God with all that we are (Matt. 22:37-38).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some ways a total commitment to Jesus may be displayed? (with love and grace addressing the sin in a loved one's life; leaving home and even country to take the gospel to the nations; obedience to the law of love, loving God first and loving others as yourself; sacrificing your preferences, desires, and even life for the sake of another; confessing your own sin and seeking forgiveness from those you have wronged)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 59) to contrast Jesus' call to discipleship—to take up our cross—with our natural tendency toward self-preservation.

We are commanded to love our families, but we are called to love Jesus even more. Scripture also has the expectation that we will love ourselves, yet still we should love Jesus so much that our love for ourselves looks like hatred in comparison. Instead of calling disciples toward self-preservation, Jesus teaches the opposite: we should take up our cross when we follow Him, prepared to follow Him all the way to Calvary. We should come to Christ as if we have already died because our lives belong completely to Him.



Voices from Church History

“The disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.”²

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)

- By nature, we are preservers of self. We generally avoid and even run from pain and harm. Jesus' words in this passage, however, fly in the face of self-protection. He has already told us that our love for Him must surpass our love for other people—a radical calling for His disciples. Now He calls His disciples to be willing to die—even by death on a cross!
 - Historically, treating our bodies as precious gifts from God has been questioned by certain traditions. Gnosticism, a heresy that plagued the early church, for example, taught that our earthly bodies, indeed all things physical, hold no worth. But Scripture teaches that our bodies are temples to be stewarded well (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and that they will be resurrected and reunited with our souls on the day Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:42-44).
 - Jesus' call to “hate” our own lives and bear our own crosses does not equate to a hatred of self, as if we were trash. Rather, true discipleship is the ultimate in self-preservation. It is playing the long-game, as it were. If we make it our aim to preserve our lives in the here and now, then we will lose them in hell. But if we take up our cross in willingness to die with and for Jesus Christ, then we will find them for eternity in heaven with the Lord (Matt. 16:24-27).
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Point 3: Being Jesus' disciple requires a costly commitment (Luke 14:28-35).

READ Luke 14:28-35 (DDG p. 60).

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.

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ 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."

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 60) to reiterate the seriousness of becoming Jesus' disciple: The cost of following Jesus is incalculable because **following Him will cost us everything**.

Through two illustrations—building a tower and going to war—Jesus warned His listeners that following Him is not just a passive decision but an active assessment of everything we're willing to give up for Him. The cost of following Him is incalculable because **following Him will cost us everything**. If we are not willing to part with the things most precious to us and put Jesus in the place of preeminence, 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.

- Through His illustrations about building a tower and going to war, Jesus is telling His listeners that following Him isn't something we should wake up one day and decide to do without first stopping to count the cost. It isn't something we can do halfheartedly. Like building a tower, discipleship isn't something we can abandon halfway through; it is a *commitment* we need to see through to the end. And like going to war, discipleship has *consequences*; either we are willing to fight to the death or surrender to the superior power. To take up our cross and follow Jesus is a lifelong endeavor with eternal significance.
- Jesus concluded these two illustrations with a tangible cost: renouncing all possessions for the sake of discipleship. In other words, when we become disciples of Jesus, we hand over all of our possessions to Him and commit to being stewards of what is now His to use as He sees fit. So, count the cost.

Illustration: Imagine going house-hunting without consulting the bank first and then sitting down to sign your papers with no means of handing over the down payment. No matter how far you got into your journey, the moment all parties involved realized there wasn't a bank involved, the journey would come to a screeching halt with so many days and countless hours of work wasted.

Illustration: Every culture has some notion of a senseless war somewhere in its history. For example, the Trojan War was a decade-long affair that resulted in the deaths of thousands of men and numerous heroes, all for the sake of revenge over an adulterous wife. Jesus took this notion of a senseless war 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, even one without personal glory. Following Jesus is not a ploy for earthly renown because to truly follow Jesus is to spurn earthly personal glory for ourselves, in whatever form that might take, in favor of the eternal glorification of God.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some ways we may experience the cost of discipleship to Jesus Christ? (God calls us to give sacrificially of our finances for the sake of His mission and His church; our earthly reputation may suffer as we take unpopular stands for Christ and His ideals; we may have to live a life that does not meet the standards of our worldly dreams; we may have to leave a good-paying job to follow God’s call to serve Him in some other way)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 60) to point to Jesus’ expectation for His disciples to act as salt in a dying, decaying world.

In verses 34-35, Jesus told His listeners that His disciples are expected to be the salt of the earth. As we discussed in the previous session, our job as Christians is to act as an agent of preservation in a dying, decaying world. With the message and ministry of the gospel, we seek to arrest the curse of death in individuals and in society. But we can only do so—we can only be effective “salt”—as committed disciples of Jesus Christ who have counted the cost and found following Jesus to be worth the price.

- Halfhearted and uncommitted discipleship is of no good to this world nor to our own souls, just like salt that has lost its taste and effectiveness has no more benefit and must be thrown out. “Disciples” who hold onto the stuff and sin of this world are showing that their true allegiance is to this world, not to Jesus. They are “disciples” in name only.
 - True disciples, however, will hear Jesus’ words and be convicted of their complacency, which we all have to one degree or another. Who among us can live up to Jesus’ perfect standard of discipleship, after all? Thankfully, Jesus has accomplished that perfect standard for us. So we can come to Him again and again, having counted the cost and finding forgiveness and strength to live as His faithful disciples.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 How have you had opportunities to be the salt of the earth for the glory of Jesus in the past week? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: Counting the cost of discipleship is an important step in making a commitment to Christ. Halfhearted 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 a life 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 do 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 asking of us—and He will return it to us a hundredfold.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 61), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

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.

- **In what areas of your life do you need to make a total commitment to Jesus, and how will you do so?**
- **How might your group need to support one another when the cost of discipleship hits home?**
- **When sharing the gospel message, how will you faithfully communicate and live the cost of discipleship?**



Voices from Church History

"It does cost something to be a real Christian, according to the standard of the Bible. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, an Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, a race to be run. Conversion is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict, in which it costs much to win the victory."³

—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You are worthy of all honor, worship, and devotion. Owing us nothing but Your judgment, You instead gave up Your life on the cross so that we might experience life in You, the resurrection and the life. Help us to walk in the Spirit as we glorify the Father by following You, giving of ourselves for the sake of others in the privileged task of not only being disciples but also making disciples. Amen.

PACK ITEM 8: HYMN HANDOUT: Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 62-64), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 65) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 62-64) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 65) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 62-64) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 5** as a part of point 3 in the session: **Following Jesus will cost us everything. And if everything is not what we are willing to give, then we are not ready to commit to the calling of being His disciples.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** "Jesus is not a salesman trying to make a commission, nor is He a modern-day influencer trying to garner as many followers as possible."
- **Day 2:** "Jesus loves His bride not for what she can give to Him but because of what He can provide for her as a recipient of God's grace."



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 65) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to share with one another about a sacrifice they've had to make for the sake of following Jesus and how it has proven worthwhile.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: Being Jesus' disciple requires a clear commitment (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.”⁴

“The gospel includes Christ's call to follow after him, not just to believe certain truths and do certain moral actions. Luke's record of some assorted interactions between Jesus and potential followers shows that the call of the gospel does have a cost: it reveals our values and our hearts (recall 2:35). The call of Christ lays bare whether we are devoted to God's kingdom or whether we are split in our allegiance.”⁵

Point 2: Being Jesus' disciple requires a total commitment (Luke 14:25-27).

“**Hate his own** here hyperbolically expresses the same principle found in Matthew 10:37, where Jesus says, ‘The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.’ Both Luke and Matthew convey the same point. Disciples must love Jesus more than they love their own family members.”⁶

“The call to ‘hate’ is not literal but rhetorical. Otherwise, Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself as a summation of what God desires makes no sense (Luke 10:25-37). The call to hate simply means to ‘love less’ (Gen. 29:30-31; Deut. 21:15-17; Judg. 14:16). The image is strong, but it is not a call to be insensitive or to leave all feeling behind . . . Following Jesus is to be the disciple's ‘first love.’ This pursuit is to have priority over any family member and one's own life, which means that other concerns are to take second place to following Jesus (Luke 8:19-21; 9:59-62; 12:4,49-53; 16:13). Matthew 10:37-39, Luke 9:24, and John 12:25 make a similar point, though Matthew speaks of loving family more, rather than hating, thereby softening the remark's emotive force.”⁷

Point 3: Being Jesus' disciple requires a costly commitment (Luke 14:28-35).

“The Gospel somewhere says that a person who begins to build a tower but stops with the foundations and never completes it is ridiculous. What do we learn from this parable? We learn that we should work to bring every aspiration to a conclusion, completing the work of God by an elaborate building up of his commandments. One stone does not make a complete tower, nor does one commandment bring the perfection of the soul to its desired measure. It is necessary to both erect the foundation and, as the apostle says, ‘to lay upon it a foundation of gold and precious stones.’ That is what the products of the commandments are called by the prophet when he says, ‘I have loved your commandment more than gold and much precious stone.’”⁸

“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).”⁹

“Parables recorded only in Luke form the heart of this section. Jesus emphasizes that the cost of discipleship is high; those who desire to enter the kingdom ought to reflect deeply on the sacrifice that is necessary in order to do so (v. 27) ... Only those who have committed themselves to Christ and who have persevered over the long term are truly saved. Here the text does call for giving up all. Genuine believers give up ownership and control of their lives and possessions and instead become God’s steward of these. Christ must be set above everyone and everything in a person’s life. Nothing less will do. While **the cost** of following Christ is high (vv. 28-30), the cost of not following Him is higher still (vv. 31-32).”¹⁰

References

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10. Tamra Hernandez, “Luke,” in *The Study Bible for Women* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014), 1353, n. 14:25-35.