

“Good” often becomes the worst enemy of “best.” ...

Sometimes our passions... even though they are good... right... spiritual... and very Biblical... can keep us from what is **best**. ... The **best** for us as Christians is to be growing in our obedience to Christ... to the point that we **abandon** our own will... moment by moment in submission to Christ... throughout our entire day.

Often however... instead of constant surrender to Christ’s leading... we settle for one of the many good things we can do as a believer. ... Who could argue that witnessing is **not** a good thing for a Christian to regularly do... or Bible memorization... or daily prayer...? Sometimes though, as believers... we engage in these good things to the exclusion of a moment by moment submission to Christ.

C.S. Lewis wrote: “Abandon to God is of more value than personal holiness. ... When we are abandoned to God, He works through us all the time.”

But abandonment is rare... isn’t it? We always seem to have some restraint in our Christian walk. “*God, is this really what You want me to do...?*” “*God if I obey this, I will suffer some unpleasant consequence...*” Best takes a lot of courage... so we settle for good. Listen to this definition of “courage”...

“*Courage* is almost a contradiction in terms. ... It means a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die.”

Consider this definition of courage from CK Chesterton. It is pretty powerful. ... He goes on to explain:

"He that will lose his life... the same shall save it' ... is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. ... It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers." ... [A man] "can only get away from death... by continually stepping within an inch of it. ... A soldier surrounded by enemies... if he is to cut his way out... needs to combine a strong desire for living... with a strange carelessness about dying.... He must not merely cling to life... for then he will be a coward... and will not escape. ... He must not merely wait for death... for then there will be a suicide... and he will not escape. ... He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water... and yet drink death like wine."

A true Christian man or woman is NOTHING at all like the way we are often portrayed by Hollywood... in movies and television shows. (Christians are often rendered as spineless wimps who only live by their convictions when it is convenient. ... However... the Bible shows that it takes strong **courage** to live out our faith. ... We are told by our passage this morning that we must... in order to live out our faith... pay a significant cost. ... It will cost us relationally... and it will cost us sacrificially.

After a brief introduction by telling us that a lot of people started following Jesus... great crowds of people gathered around Him wherever He went... Luke slaps us with an absolutely shocking statement from Jesus.

Luke 14:25-26

Great **multitudes** were constantly around Jesus because of his kingdom preaching and power. ... I'm sure it was more fun than a three-ring circus. And so many of those followers had the mentality of an audience at a circus. They were there simply to be entertained by being wowed... awed... amazed. ... In today's terms there were throngs of "gapers," hangers-on with no commitment. ... And they conducted themselves as if they were there to be amused and regaled. ... But that was **not** why Jesus

came. ... So Jesus gave them a reality check as He laid out in unforgettable terms the cost of being a disciple.

Churches today can attract a lot of people. But not everyone comes for the right reason. ... Many come with an expectation to be entertained. If we are not amusing enough... they will go look elsewhere.

Now... I certainly don't want our services to be boring... I have always **feared** putting people to sleep with the way I present the Word of God...(Especially when I first started out in ministry...) I am very motivated to present it in ways that are interesting and relevant. ... But we are not here on Sunday mornings for the **entertainment** value. ... And sometimes... when people see that our primary goal is to encourage a daily... moment-by-moment submission to Christ... the kind that takes incredible amounts of courage... the "entertainment seekers" start backing away.

When **Christ** began to attract big crowds... He turned up the level of commitment discussion. "*This is what I am after,*" He tells them. "*It isn't large crowds for the sake of having a horde of mere followers... I want **disciples**... and *this* is what a disciple **is**...*"

I hope that you are here this morning... for **no less** a reason than to be molded and shaped into a better disciple... God may have brought you here today so that you might start counting the cost of what that means. Any would-be disciple... must understand that discipleship **will** cost them dearly... though the **benefit** of following Christ would make it all worthwhile.

Jesus' opening declaration was a shocker: ... "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." ... Jesus wanted his listeners to **think**.

Certainly... in light of what all of Scripture teaches... we cannot conclude that Jesus was demanding an unqualified hatred. ... Stop and consider... that He could not command, "*Honor your father and mother*" (in Mark 7:9-13)... and then turn right around and demand that we also hate them. ... Jesus could not advise them to hate their spouses... and then later allow the Apostle Paul to issue the charge, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (in Ephes. 5:25). ... Jesus... Who we see in Mark 10:16... be so loving to little children... taking the children in His arms... putting His hands on them... and blessing them... would not then advise their parents to hate them. ... Neither could He advise His followers in Matthew 5:24... to "*be reconciled to your brother*"... only to then... encourage brotherly hatred. ... IT JUST MAKES NO SENSE... I mean... How could Jesus command, "*Love your enemies*" (Luke 6:27)... and then call us to hate our friends?

But the truth is... we **can** focus on our family **too** much... we can dote on our loved ones **too** much... and it is possible that we can love... even our own life... too much. ... Jesus could not be recommending a psychologically destructive loathing of existence. ...What Jesus was saying... paradoxically... was that our love for Him must be **so great**... and **all-encompassing**... that our natural love of self and family pales... in comparison. ... We are to subordinate everything... even our own being... to our love and commitment to Christ. ... He is to be our first loyalty. ... All other relationships must take **second** place.

The word *hate* does not suggest positive antagonism but rather "to love less." Our love for Christ must be so strong that all other love is like hatred in comparison.

So with a harsh... puzzling quip... Jesus yanks us from our dreamworld.

"Do you fancy yourself a disciple? ... Do you think of yourself as a follower of Christ...? ... Jesus says that you **ONLY ARE**... if you love Him so much that your love for your family seems like hatred in comparison! ... "*Make Me far more significant than any other relationship in your life... or... don't even pretend to be following Me!*" ... Jesus' words astonish us.

Perhaps these words hit us a little harder in our day... because... in the secularized... anti-family culture our society has become... we evangelicals... have placed family at the epi-center of our Christian being. ... It is proper for us to hold marriage and family in **HIGH ESTEEM**... But some of us betray that we are **not** disciples of Jesus Christ... because we hold Him somewhere at a lower level. Believe it or not... but we love our wives... our husbands... and children... **more** than we love God.

Just ask... Have you ever placed your family's development... financially... scholastically... athletically... intellectually... culturally... artistically... or socially - **before** you placed their **spiritual** well-being? Have you regularly spent more time in any of these areas in one day... than you have given time in one month in prayer for their souls...? ... By comparison, our lives may reveal that we have it in reverse. Using Christ's statement... We hate **God**... and love our families disproportionately—and that we are not Jesus' disciples.

The paradox is... that the proper way to love our children... is to "hate" them... because our greater love for **God**... will enable us to love **them** with a greater love! ... Disciples are the best lovers of God and of family and friends.

Allow me to quote C.S. Lewis once again:

“When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. Insofar as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.”

The relational cost of discipleship may seem harsh at first. But in right perspective and priority this focuses our lives and makes them richer and fuller.

There is a relational cost to being a disciple of Jesus. ... And there is also a sacrificial cost...

Luke 14:27

Being a discipleship means that we must go through a series of deaths — the Christian life is a perpetual dying. ... Dying to self is not a one time event. It isn't even something that we do only once a day... and we're good. ... Disciples follow Christ on a constant path of self-denial. ... Disciples embrace suffering as a part of life. The disciple's life is not easy.

What does it mean to "carry the cross"? ... It means daily identification with Christ in shame... suffering... and surrender to God's will. ... It means

death to self... to our own plans and ambitions... and a willingness to serve Him as He directs. ...

A "cross" is something we willingly accept from God as part of His will for our lives. ... The Christian who called his difficult boss at work the "cross" he had to bear... certainly did not understand the meaning of dying to self... The person who is in great debt without enough money to pay the bills... and wants to refer to that as the cross they must bear... does not have a clue about the meaning of that phrase. ... People who just endure... who gut it out through sheer determination... are not carrying the cross that Christ says they must bear. ...Your cross is not a mere hardship... It isn't whatever makes you miserable... it is a change of heart and mind... it is a putting away your own will and surrendering to Christ.

C. S Lewis had it right when he said : The Christian way is different. ...Christ says, "Give me all. ... I don't want so much of your time... and so much of your money... and so much of your work... ... I want you!I have not come to **torment** your natural self... but to **kill** it. ... No half-measures are any good. ... I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there... I want to have the **whole tree** down. Hand over the whole natural self... all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked — the whole outfit."

Discipleship requires **everything**. ...There are no exceptions. Discipleship calls for sacrifice. ... Here are a few more quotes from some Godly men...

Look, it all consists in the cross, and it all lies in dying; and there is no other way to life and true peace within.

- Thomas à Kempis

Abandon to God is of more value than personal holiness. ... When we are abandoned to God, He works through us all the time.

- Oswald Chambers

Jesus has many who love his kingdom in heaven, but few who bear his cross. He has many who desire comfort, but few who desire suffering. He finds many to share his feast, but few his fasting. All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to suffer for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of his passion. Many admire his miracles, but few follow him in the humiliation of the cross.

- Thomas à Kempis

Having challenged his hearers about the cost of discipleship with two parallel sayings, Jesus now used twin parables of a tower and a war to encourage his followers to count the cost:

Luke 14:28-33

I want to make an observation about what we just read... that perhaps is **not** very obvious at first. It may change the meaning of this for you... but I believe it is true.

Jesus has just given here... three parables to explain **why** He makes such costly demands on His followers. ... The man building a tower in the parable... and the king fighting a war... are not who you initially think they are. ... The usual interpretation... our first thoughts are... that the man building the tower... and the king fighting the war... represent believers... and we had better "count the cost"... before we start... lest we start and not be able to finish. ... But I agree with Bible commentator... Campbell Morgan... that the builder and the king do not represent the believer... but they represent Jesus Christ. ... (Now that really changes our understanding.)

What I believe is that **Christ** *is the One who must "count the cost" ... to see whether **we** are the kind of material He can use... to build the church and battle the enemy.* He cannot get the job done with halfhearted followers who will not pay the price.

Discipleship is **serious** business. ... If we are not true disciples... then Jesus cannot build the tower and fight the war. ... There is only one way of being a disciple... and that is by being **devoted** to Jesus.

If we tell Jesus that we want to take up our cross and follow Him as His disciples... then He wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. ...He will use us as stones for building His church... soldiers for battling His enemies... and salt for bettering His world. It will not always be pleasant. Most of our rewards will be delayed. – *But He is looking for quality... and will make us into such... if we allow Him.*

Luke 14:34-35

Jesus had already told His disciples that they were "the salt of the earth" (in Matt. 5:13). ... Whenever one of us... as sinners first trust Jesus Christ as Savior... a miracle takes place - "clay" is turned into "salt."

Salt was a valued item in that day; in fact, part of a soldier's pay was given in salt (The words *salt* and *salary* are related; hence, the saying)

Salt is a preservative... and God's people in this world are helping to retard the growth of evil and decay. ... Salt is also a purifying agent... an antiseptic that makes things cleaner. ... It may sting when it touches the wound... but it helps to kill infection. ... Salt gives flavor to things and... most of all... makes people thirsty. (By our character and conduct... we ought to be making others thirsty for the Lord Jesus Christ... and the salvation that He alone can give.)

Our modern salt is pure and does not lose its flavor... but the salt in Jesus' day was impure and could lose its flavor... especially if it came in contact with earth. ... Once the saltiness was gone... there was no way to restore it... and the salt was thrown out into the street... as a weed killer... making a distinguishable hardened dirt path to be walked on. ... When a disciple loses his Christian character... he is "good for nothing" ... and will eventually be "walked on" by others... and bring disgrace to Christ.

We sometimes lose our saltiness because you and I are not integrated... unified... whole persons. ... Our hearts are multi-divided. ... It's like we have a board room in every heart.

Imagine: a big table... leather chairs... coffee... bottled water... and a whiteboard. ... A committee sits around the table in your heart. ... There is the social you... the private you... the work self... the sexual self... the recreational self... the religious self... and others. ... The committee is arguing and debating and voting... constantly agitated and upset. ... Rarely can they come to a unanimous... wholehearted decision. ... We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. ... But the truth is that we're just divided... unfocused... hesitant... and unfree.

Then we "accept Jesus" into our lives. ... Now... we can "accept Jesus" in one of two different ways. ... One way is to invite Him onto the committee. Give Him a vote too. ... But then He becomes just one more complication.

The other way to "accept Jesus" is to say to him... *"My life isn't working. Please come in and fire my committee... every last one of them. ... I hand myself over to You. ... I am Your responsibility now. ... Please run my whole life for me."*

"Accepting Jesus" is not just adding Jesus. It is also subtracting the idols. Consistently throw these idols out... every day. Everytime God shows you that you have a more important relationship than Him as your epi-center... put Him back in His rightful place. Everytime God shows you that you are operating from your own agenda... not submitting to Christ's agenda... kill that idol which insists on its own way.