

# The True Cost of Discipleship

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*Luke*

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**Bible Text:** Luke 14:25-33

**Preached on:** Sunday, February 6, 2022

## **Providence Church**

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Our passage this morning is Luke 14:25-33. The title of this message is "The True Cost of Discipleship." So if you have your copy of God's word this morning, please turn with me to Luke 14 and we'll be looking at verses 25 to 33. Now I admit every preacher kind of cheats when they say, "Turn with me," because we've already got it marked in our Bibles and we just open it wide open, so I'll wait on you for just a second and then we will get started. Our task this morning is simple: to see God's word for what it is, not for what we want it to be. We will be forced to wrestle with some very difficult truths that very well could change every aspect of our lives. These are hard words that we are going to be looking at and words that we should come to with fear and trembling. The first pulpit that I ever preached in was at Grace Baptist Church in Somerset, Kentucky, and right here on the pulpit was this little placard that said, "If you are standing here, you are required to preach what God's word says, not what you want it to say." So this morning, we will look at what God's word says, not what we want it to say, not filled with the opinions of men.

Now this week has been really difficult for me. I've been forced to come face-to-face with the words that are on this page, to think through the implications of what does this look like in my life, what does this look like in the life of our church. I think it calls into question some of the things that we might have been doing or we're thinking about doing. It changes the way that we look at the world and the way that we look at our life and how short it actually is. It's been a difficult week just to see loved ones that I hold so dear from other places, Louisville and all around that have gone through some very difficult things this week that have brought me to my knees and made me wonder, is this Christian life fully worth it, and the answer to that is a resounding yes. But this morning, we will be wrestling with some very deep and difficult things so let's come before this knowing that it is God's revelation of himself, that it is fully reliable and trustworthy.

Our text is Luke 14:25-33 and we'll read there and ask for the Lord's grace.

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. 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.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

*Our heavenly Father, these are hard words, words that will shake the very foundation that we have built our lives upon, words that will push us to the limits of what we are capable of, words that will test our faith and our resolve but, Lord, I pray that you would build within us a desire to follow you no matter the cost, that you would grant us the grace to love you beyond calculation and beyond measure for it is only your grace that we will be able to do so. I pray that you would give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts prepared to respond in accordance with what you have called us to. Lord, be with us in this moment, grant us your grace, we pray in your Son's name. Amen.*

Have you considered how much it will cost to follow Jesus? Have you wrestled through that? Have you seriously thought about what this means for your life? Have you thought about what it has already cost you? You look back and you see your Christian life and you say, "This is what it's already cost me," have you considered that recently? Or have you thought about what it might cost you soon to follow Jesus? Many people today have trusted in Jesus without truly understanding what it means to follow him, what it means to be a disciple, and just how much it truly costs you to be his.

The modern church, not this church but the modern church in general has sold a bill of goods to people saying that you can follow Jesus on your own terms, you can come to him on your own terms, whatever you want you can bring into the relationship, teaching people that Jesus exists to make you happy, to give you some sort of good feeling, to give you everything that you could ever want or dream of. And what happens is that now we have these so-called churches that are preaching and teaching soft, watered down truths, and often bold-faced lies and are producing a bunch of people who will turn tail and run the moment life gets hard. Have you counted the cost?

This is why we are seeing so many people today turn around with these massive faith deconstructions because life got hard and they were built upon a shaky foundation, but as we heard last Sunday, we don't build our faith or base our faith in our own experiences about how we feel, the emotions that we have, we build it upon the solid rock of God's word and Christ Jesus. So our aim this morning is to do this very thing but before we do so, I want to consider an example of someone who did this very thing, who truly

considered the cost of following Jesus and yet was unwavering in his commitment to him even to the point of death.

Well-known missionary Jim Elliot was a man marked by strong convictions. I recently finished his autobiography, well, somewhat autobiography, "Shadow of the Almighty," where it's a collection of letters and journals that he has recorded over the time of his life and if you've read them, you know he was a very strongly worded man, that he held his convictions very highly, and that he was unwavering in those convictions, and he believed that God was leading him to a life devoted to ministering to people in some of the hardest places. He believed his life was devoted to the gospel, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth though it might cause a great deal of suffering for him and possibly even death. He was so certain that God was calling him to this that he would set aside everything else in this world, worldly comforts, a good providing job. He even said at one point he would never marry so that he could give his entire life to the ministry of the gospel. Now if you've read his biography, you know what's coming in just a moment.

On one occurrence, he wrote in a young woman's yearbook after he graduated college, 2 Timothy 2:4 which reads, "No soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs." That woman whose college yearbook he wrote in turned out to be his wife, so clearly he wasn't right on that one. On October 28, 1949, Jim Elliot wrote in his journal one of the greatest lines that we have seen in past generations or really in recent generations, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Many years later, Jim would move to the jungles of Ecuador. He had a strong heart for the ministry of the gospel for being a missionary and said he wanted to go to the hardest to reach places. He wanted to go to the jungles and his heart really longed for the Auca people group. This was a people group that had been unreached, really no attempts had been made because they killed anyone that got near. They were a violent, brutal group that was unreached, unengaged and there was really no plans to reach them.

So Jim picked up and moved his life to the jungles of Ecuador. He began to learn the language. He began to translate the Bible for them hoping that some sort of door would open up, something would open to where he could be there. While he was waiting to enter into their village, he wrote these words, "More and more that tribe, the Aucas, is brought before me as a possible field of labor for my life. They are utterly untouched and so far they are inaccessible and it would take a miracle to open the way to them and we are praying for that miracle." On January 8, 1956, the miracle would come. Having waited for so long, a breakthrough finally arrived. They had been flying over the jungles looking for this village trying to find a way in. They would fly over and announce all sorts of different welcoming phrases, greeting phrases, trying to develop some sort of relationship with them. Finally they spotted the village and were able to drop some things to them, some welcome gifts to say we love you, we care for you, and we want to get to know you. They found a landing strip on the edge of the river that was near their village, it was a sandbar really but they called it a landing strip. They landed on it and began to try and engage them. They shouted things into the jungle trying to meet them, talk to them, just love on them. Eventually a couple of people came out of the woods, a man and

two women from the tribe. They greeted them as best as they could, talked with them, ended up taking the man up on a flight in the plane. He waved at his village and greeted them and when they returned they said, "Here are some gifts for you and we want you to come back and bring people." And they praised God because God had opened a door for them to be able to engage the Auca people.

So they waited. They waited on something to happen, on the villagers to return, someone to come and greet them again and they didn't really have to wait long. While they waited, Nate Saint, the pilot, took his plane back up, flew over their village trying to see if he could find them again, and he saw a group of about 10-15 people coming towards the beach where they were at. He knew this was the moment that they had been waiting for. So as he landed, he gave the report to Jim Elliot and three other men and said, "They are coming, the door is open." So they fell to their knees thanking God for what he had done and they sang a hymn, and then moments later those five men were speared to death by the very people that they came to reach. Their wives found their bodies a couple of days later washed up on the shore of the river. Everything that they had absolutely brutally torn apart. But their death served as a miracle because it opened the door for their now widows to get into the village and share the gospel with them. It opened the way for the gospel to go to a people that had just killed their husbands.

Jim Elliot considered the cost of following Jesus. He knew that it might cost him his life and though it ultimately did cost him his life, he knew that it was worth every last breath. So this morning, I want us to look at the cost of following Jesus that Jesus lays out, not the one that we create but the one that is laid out in scripture. What will it cost us to follow him and I hope to show you that though this cost may be high, Jesus is supremely worth giving all of our lives to, handing everything over to him. To do this, we will look at four different requirements of discipleship. He says in most of these requirements, "if you do not do this, you cannot be my disciple." So these are not options, added on bonuses to being a believer. They are requirements. Four different requirements.

The first one, requirement 1: a greater love. Following Jesus and being a disciple of Jesus requires a greater love. The beginning of our text this morning gives us a very important detail. He's speaking to a great crowd. Now the backstory to all of this, a lot of people have begun to follow him as he is speaking very powerful messages, he is performing miracles, he's really going against the day and age that they were accustomed to and so people just start running towards him. You've got men, women, children, everyone, Pharisees, tax collectors, it doesn't matter who it is, they're showing up and they're following him and you're probably looking at a crowd of several thousand people. Now every good preacher would be, "All right, this is an opportunity to share the gospel, to call these people in. They are welcoming this." But Jesus turns and gives them these hard words. How about that for trying to grow the church? That is an interesting church growth strategy. So many churches today try and teach watered down truths to be more approachable. They try and simplify the Bible and maybe even pick and choose what they want to teach so that more people will come, so they can get more "conversions" to make their numbers look better. But we don't exist for that here at Providence, we follow Jesus for what his word says. This is not the model that Jesus is laying out here. He is not

saying, "You can follow me on your terms," he's saying, "You have to follow me on my terms."

It's going to be really hard for these people to wrestle with so the question is: who do you love the most? Who is your greatest love? Is it your husband or your wife? Is it your child, your children? Is it your parents? Your friends? Your boyfriend? Your girlfriend? Who do you love the most? Who garnishes, who gathers the majority of your love? For a Christian the answer is simple, the only appropriate answer is Jesus. He gets all of my love, not some of my love, not a little bit of my love or even the majority of my love, he gets it all. It all belongs to him. But Jesus doesn't just say that, "You have to love me," he takes it a step further in this passage. All other loves should look like hate in comparison to the love that you have for him, and I so love that you read from Leviticus 19 and from the book of John and that we looked at in Proverbs, the love of neighbor, because all of that love and that great love does not compare to the love that we're about to talk about. We should have a superior, a greater love for Jesus, and it should be so far superior, in fact, so much greater that anyone that sees it will look at them and say, "You hate everyone else." The question that we have to ask from this, though, is: is this radical love, this radical demand to love and hate, is it in contradiction with the word of God? We've just heard from loving your enemy, loving your neighbor, loving whoever it is, right? And so is this in contradiction, is Jesus contradicting his own words?

Let's look at a few possible examples that he might be contradicting. Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother." How would this be in contradiction? He says if you do not hate your own father and mother. Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 5:22, the words of Jesus, "Everyone who is angry or harbors hatred in his heart with his brother will be liable to judgment." Matthew 5:43-44, "Love your neighbor as yourself and love your enemies." So are Jesus and the scriptures, or even what he said, at odds? Is he contradicting himself? Which the obvious answer to that is absolutely not. We know that to be the case, we know that to be true, and that's the short answer but in order to really understand this, you have to get to the language of this passage because it's very confusing language.

If you do not hate. That's pretty straightforward. What does it mean to hate in this particular area? Now this is a Hebrew idiom; it's idiomatic language that's trying to describe a love one, hate the other. It's a comparative. We know that from Matthew 10:37 where he says, "Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." So it's the Hebrew idiom of love and hate, it's a comparative, and then we interpret it based on Matthew 10:37 where he says, "If you love these people more than me." So we put those things together, what we're looking at here is not an actual hatred because the scripture does command us to love our neighbor, to love our enemy, to honor father and mother, he says that wives and husbands are good gifts to one another, you should love one another, you love your child, but it's a comparative. Who do you love the most? Who do you give your love to?

Love one more than the other. In order to be a disciple of Jesus, this is not conditional, this is not optional, you must love him beyond measure; you must have a vastly superior love for Christ, so much so that all of these look like hate. And this love is so vastly different from what the world says, from what the world describes a real love is. We live in a world fueled by materialistic love. Love your stuff, love your things, driven with a casual comfortable almost emotional charged type love that tells you to love whatever makes you the happiest, yet what Jesus demands is a radical love, a radical love for him no matter how hard it will be and no matter how much it will cost you. It means that you love Jesus more than these few things, your husband and wife, your good things, but you love Jesus more than that. You love Jesus more than your children, more than your friends, your parents, your job, your stuff, whatever it is you fill in the blank with, you love Christ far and beyond any of that. It means that your love for him is so overwhelmingly superior that everyone else would look at it and say, "You hate the rest of the world compared to the love that you have for him." And this gives a fresh perspective to Deuteronomy 6. Deuteronomy 6 says essentially love the Lord your God with every fiber of your being, with all of you, love God. This is what it looks like, you love God with everything that is in you by laying aside everything else that will get in the way.

Why is this radical love a requirement for discipleship? Because, first and foremost, Christ loved us first. We love because he first loved us. This is the message of what's going on here. Christ had what the world would say radical and superior love for us, and ultimately though not immediately in this context, a couple chapters down the road he's going to model this type of love by going to the cross, by being obedient to the Father, by suffering and dying in our place. His love for us was driven by a greater love, first and foremost, for God the Father, and his love for the Father was so vastly superior that he followed and obeyed him even unto death, even though it meant losing his earthly family. He had to leave behind his mother at one point, behind his brothers, he had to leave behind his friends. He was rejected by some of the people that followed him. He was rejected by his own nation but it didn't matter to him because his love for God and his love for us was so vastly superior that he was willing to lay it all on the line to redeem a people for himself and his love for the Father outweighed all other costs. And he calls us to this type of love, to a love that lays everything else aside to be obedient to God and follow him. It is a vastly superior love.

Here's the paradox: we don't have that love within us. Let's just be real for a moment. We don't have that within us. We don't have the capacity to love Christ and to love God in a way that he is commanding of us here. So what do we do? We fall on our knees trusting that God provides grace abundantly in love. Abundantly. It's all from him. This love does not come from us, it comes from Christ so we look to Christ, we fall on our knees in pleas for mercy, we repent of all of those other things that get in the way of our love for him and we trust him completely knowing that he provides the love that we need.

I recently attended the Neidert wedding, I told them I was going to mention this so there you go. I recently attended their wedding and I'll just pick on my friend here because Nick cried all day. It was an emotionally driven day. He woke up crying. I saw him, he

cried. Saw his family, he cried. We all laid hands on him and prayed over him for the wedding, he cried. He gave a speech to all of his groomsmen, he cried. He hugged his dad, he cried. He hugged his mom, he cried. The general theme here is he cried a lot. There was a lot of tears that day but they were joyful tears, but the majority of the tears showed up when the doors opened and his beautiful bride was standing there prepared to marry him. He cried. She cried. Everybody cried. As she's walking down the aisle the tears are flowing more. As they're saying their vows their tears are flowing more. Then when you get to after they have walked out and all of the bridesmaids and groomsmen have walked out, they are weeping almost uncontrollably because of the joy and the love that they share for one another.

And I don't share that to embarrass them but I share it to say that that is an overwhelming love, an emotional, beautiful, powerful love, an image of Christ and his church, yes, but here's the crazy part because you would say that's one of the greatest acts of love that you have seen and what Christ is saying is, "Your love for me should be so far above that that the love that was on display that led to so many tears and so much weeping looks like hate in comparison." How is that for a picture? That overwhelming love between a husband and a wife does not even scratch the surface of the love that we should have for Christ. This is what he's calling us to. This is a costly love and it means that all of our affections belong to Jesus. We don't give him part of our lives. We don't give him part of our heart. We give him every ounce of our being. We love him with everything that we have and we love God though it may mean that we are rejected by our family. We love him though it may cost you all of your friends. We love God and obey God that it may mean putting your family in danger for the sake of taking the gospel to the unreached. We love him unconditionally and beyond measure and we plead with God to give us the grace to love him in a way that we cannot in our own means.

So I'll ask the question again: who do you love the most? Do you love your husband or your wife, your children, your friends, or even your own life more? And we'll get on that last part in just a second. If you would answer, "Yes, I love my family more than Jesus," you would answer, "I love my kids more than Jesus, my job more than Jesus," any of those things, you cannot be his disciple. Point blank. "Because if you love anything above me, you cannot be my disciple. Your love for me should outweigh every other love, so much so that it looks like hate." And we trust that he grants us the grace for it but in order to follow him and in order to truly be his disciple, you must love him beyond anything else.

Requirement number 2: we follow him unto death. You see this, we unpacked this a little bit, after his love for at the very end of verse 26, "yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." The second requirement is more difficult than the first, even though the first is already hard enough. The two are very closely connected as you see at the back end of 26 and flowing into 27. But these are hard. Let's just be honest, they are. You must follow Jesus even if it costs you your own life but you must love him beyond measure, beyond anything else that you could imagine, so much so that you're willing to put your life on the line. So the question that you have to ask from this requirement is: are you willing to

give up your own life for the sake of following and obeying Jesus? These are hard questions. We have to wrestle through them this morning, and as we go out we're not done wrestling through them. We have to think seriously about what he is calling us to. I have to have a greater love for him. I have to put my neck on the line for him.

So are you willing to put your own life on the line? Now this passage and Philippians 4:13 are probably some of the most misreferenced New Testament passages out there. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We see a lot of prominent athletes wearing it, a lot of famous athletes saying, "I can do whatever I want because Christ is strengthening me." That is not at all what that passage is talking about, so much so that it's talking about I can go through suffering, we don't read the rest of that verse, but the same thing is true here, that I will pick up my cross and follow Jesus. A lot of people think that it means something totally different than what is in mind in this passage and we'll look at that in just a second.

So it's important that we look at what this means and what it doesn't mean and we define it by Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, if anyone would follow me, if anyone be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." So it's really a two-parter. A. It starts with a denial of self. I say, "Forget my want, forget my desires, my cares, my ambitions, my dreams. They now belong to the Lord." Deny myself. "It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." Everything changes. It's a whole paradigm shift here. It's a denial of self but a denial of self every single day. From the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep, you are required, this isn't an option, you are required to deny yourself, to set aside your personal preferences, the way of life that you want or are accustomed to, to follow him. You deny yourself. You set aside your comforts, all of your wants, all of your hopes and dreams. They now belong to him. They are his. And you set it aside every day for him.

Get past yourself for a moment. We live in such a self-centered culture that it's all about me. You look at social media and it's people posting things about them and everything that they're doing and how great their life is. You look at the conversations that we have with one another, "And I did this today and I did that today," and it's all about ourselves and the Bible is saying that's stupid. By the way, my mom yelled at me one time for saying stupid and I said it's in Proverbs so I feel like that's a justification for using that here. It's foolish. Life's not about us and people even say, "Well, the Bible is about us." It's not. It's God's revelation of himself, his story of redeeming a people. Not us, it's not about us.

So we deny ourselves, we lay ourselves aside, we say, "Forget what I want for a moment, what is God calling me to?" And we do this because we love him beyond measure, we love him more than anything else in this world. So get past yourselves, lay yourselves aside for a moment and realize this life is something more, that you were made for him. Deny yourself. The second thing that comes out of this is that you take up your cross. Here's the reason why I said this passage is often misrepresented. People come to it and believe it's take up your small sufferings every day, right? So for those that are allergic to chocolate. I don't know anybody that would be like that...me. That's my cross to bear. Or



all of the small, little, tiny sufferings of every day, "Well, it's just my cross to bear." We say that and we don't even realize the significance of what we are saying. This is not about take up your tiny sufferings. That might be a minor implication of the text but it's not the major explanation.

The original audience would have understood what this means. The original audience had seen crosses before and they knew that it wasn't something small and simple. In fact, this morning in the kid's Sunday school class, we looked at this very passage and we looked at the cross of Christ and throughout all of that story as it's leading up to his crucifixion, Jesus is mocked, he's beaten multiple times, they put a crown of thorns on his head, they spit on him, they say all of these terrible things about him, they beat him some more, they bloody his body and they make him carry a cross, somebody has to help him get it up there. It's unreal to think about what he went through before the cross and then he's on the cross, he is suffering and dying in agony. Jesus was up there for some would say six or so hours. That's a long time of suffering and many people wouldn't last a whole lot longer on the cross. So to say take up your cross, it is not just simply take up your small suffering. For them, they understood that it was a torture device, means of killing the worst of the worst, and what Jesus is saying is take up your death.

So you're denying yourself but that's not even the totality of what he's arguing for here, you take up your very death, you follow him unto death. This is not an embrace your sickness or your marital issues or embrace your difficult job or your hard child. Those are small implications but there is something more here, something more that we are missing. Anybody that took up their cross was a dead man walking. They were literally carrying the thing that was going to kill them through the streets until they were killed by it. So to take up your cross means that you are a dead man walking. It's really hard to hear, really hard to think through, really hard to imagine, and this is what Jesus has in mind when he says, "The cost of following me means that you take up your cross. You follow me unto death."

This means that we don't live to save our own lives. I wonder how often we make decisions that are going to be most comfortable for us, most beneficial for us. "Well, if that's going to put me in a bad position, I'm not going to do that. Or if that's going to put me in a position that might risk my life a little bit, there's no way, that's not happening." That's what we say. This passage is saying something completely different, "Put your life on the line for Jesus. Risk it all for him." We are no longer comfortable, safe people. We do not live casual lives. We are not just biding our time until this life is over. No, we are called, we are called to live our lives in such a way that we put everything, and I mean everything on the line for him. That means our decisions belong to him. That means our lives belong to him, our families belong to him. Everything that we own is Christ's so we put it all on the line.

And there is no greater example of this than Christ Jesus himself. As we just looked at, Christ took up our cross. He took up our cross because, remember, that's where we belong. Our sin has a cost and that cost is death, and yet Christ took our death, he took our punishment, he took our shame, he took our sin, he took up everything for us. He is

the greatest example of this because he went to death out of obedience to the Father to purchase us. He denied himself. He took up our cross and he followed the call of God to his death. What this means is that we willingly lay down our own lives because he did. He has purchased us with his life and so, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I have crucified myself. I have laid my old life down. The old person is dead."

We die to self, we follow him no matter what it costs us, even if it's death, and Jim Elliot was such a great example. I mean, this guy throughout all of his life denied all sorts of different comforts. He went to really hard places, all throughout the United States and then ultimately to the jungles of Ecuador, and then to a people that were literally known for murdering anyone who came near. They said that you are a fool to go near them. You are a fool if you try and reach them. And he didn't care because he knew that they had never been reached, they had never been engaged and there was really no plan to reach them for the sake of the gospel. And he said, "I don't care the cost. I don't care that it's going to cost my life and it might cost my family's life," which by the way, when he died he had a wife and a child, so he put it all on the line so that these people could know the grace that he knew.

So are you willing to daily die to yourself? Are you willing to lay aside your own preferences, your own cares, your own concerns, the way of life that you have grown accustomed to? Are you willing to put your family's life on the line so that you can minister the gospel across the world? Are you willing to let go of worldly comforts to follow him? And are you willing to follow him even unto death?

There are billions of people all over the world who don't know the hope of the gospel. Billions. If you could see my notes right now, I wrote millions and scratched it out and wrote billions because that's the real number. Billions of people who have never heard the truth of what we are talking about right now, that Christ die to redeem sinners. Billions of people who have no idea who Jesus is. There are so many people groups that are unreached and unengaged which means that no percentage of them know the gospel and there's really no effort to reach them right now. It's a large number. Billions.

So are we going to sit in our own comfort, in our own accustomed way of life and say that they'll figure it out, or will we put our lives on the line for Christ? Will we put our lives on the line so that they can know the power of the gospel? So that they can know that Christ came to redeem them? Will you count the cost and follow him even unto death? There are missionaries all over the globe whose heads are being chopped off because of the gospel, missionaries who are being shot because of the gospel, missionaries who are underground because of a fear for their life and yet are still preaching the gospel. And it's really easy for us to look at this and oversimplify it because we really don't live in that much discomfort here. It's pretty easy in America, let's be honest. There's not a lot of persecution so we really can't see this the way that other people are seeing it, but for Christians all over the world when they hear take up your cross, they're living it out because every day their life is on the line.

So will you put your life on the line for him? Will you do it every day? Will you deny yourself? Will you take up your cross, follow him even unto death? Jesus has pushed his hearers to the very limit, the very edge of what they can grasp. He has gone to this great crowd and said, "If you do not hate your father and mother, your brother and sister, your wife and children, and even your own life, you cannot be my disciple." Then he says, "If you do not take up your own cross, you cannot be my disciple." So two massive, painful, hard requirements. He says, "You must be obedient to me. You must love me more. You must be willing to die or you cannot, period, be my disciple." They are at the edge. These people are probably ready to turn tail and run after what they have heard.

So now he is going to give them two illustrations, two parables that help them put this into context. Our third requirement: consider the cost. Consider the cost of following Jesus. So put yourself in the crowd's shoes for just a moment. Imagine you are one of the people that are standing there hearing all of these hard words. What's going through your head? What are you thinking? How are you thinking you're going to respond? If I'm being perfectly frank, it scares me, and part of me wants to just go away. "Ah, I really didn't want to hear that. I didn't come for this today. I thought you were going to do a miracle, maybe provide some food. I don't know what I thought I could get out of this but this wasn't it." A lot of us, if we're honest, let's be honest for a minute, are probably thinking the same thing. "Hard words, I'm running. I'm done with this."

These were hard words, hard words for this crowd to hear, to think through, because up until this point it's been great teaching, it's been amazing miracles, but he realizes they're not coming to him for the right reason so he's going to push back on them and say, "Okay, you want to follow me, here's what it costs." And like every good preacher, Jesus has the perfect illustrations to drive this home. Knowing their heads were likely spinning, knowing how difficult this was for them to wage through, he gives them two images to show just how serious he really is.

The first one is the cost of building. How much will it cost? We'll look at it in verse 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'" So if you're going to build a house, any type of building, what do you do? What are the steps? What does it look like? I mean, first and foremost you're probably going to go to the bank and say, "How much do I really have here?" So you're going to get a loan and they're going to say, "You get X amount of dollars," and you're going to realize real quick how poor you are, and that's going to be really the identifying factor of all of this. This loan decides how much I can spend on my home, for instance.

So it decides what style roof I have, what kind of doors I have, if I have brick or stone, what's the interior. The cost determines everything. The loan determines everything. Then you purchase a property and you have plans drawn up, you make a plan for this home, you purchase interior decorations, exterior, all of the little nitpicky things that you want, but as problems arise, which I have some family right now that's building a home up towards Athens and problems arise when you build a house often, you have to adapt

and you have to change and sometimes you realize that it's going to cost you thousands of dollars more to fix this problem than you realized. So based on what you have been given, based on that loan, you decide, "Do I have enough to make these changes? Do I have enough to fix the problems that arise?"

So as the costs go up, the problems arise more and more and more. Do you have what it takes to pay for it? Throughout all of this it's a constant evaluation of do I have enough. Jesus is asking his hearers the exact same thing, "Do you have enough?" Count the cost. Consider the cost. Respond to this by seeing do you have the strength to make it, do you have what it takes to follow him, do you have what it takes to lay aside all of your loved ones for the sake of following him, do you have what it takes to lay your life on the line to follow him? Before anyone jumps in haphazardly, just makes a decision for Christ, makes an emotionally-based decision, he wants them to really think about it. He's pushing them hard to think about it, think about what this is going to cost you, think about how your life is going to be so radically different after following me. Don't just jump into this. Don't just make an emotionally-based decision. Give it some thought. Consider it. Because the payment will come due at some point. Will you have enough to finish the Christian race? Will you have enough to finish the walk of this life or will you be like the fool who does not consider how much it will cost him and ends up with a half built house, half built tower? Consider the cost.

Now as we've just seen, if we truly trust in Jesus and we truly hand everything over to him, he gives us the strength to do so. But have you? Have you truly laid everything at the feet of Jesus and said, "It belongs to you, even my own life"? My parents' neighborhood back in Somerset, Kentucky, there was a gas station, a BP, we used to love going down there all the time growing up because they had great food and then they sold out to somebody else and these people had great grand visions for building some sort of weird shopping center in the middle of Podunk, Kentucky because it really wasn't even a good area. It wasn't on the main strip. It was back in the middle of nowhere. It didn't make sense. There's probably a Dollar General because those things are everywhere. It turns out there was a Dollar General that came years later but that's not the point of the story.

The people purchased the gas station and then decided, I think there was rumors of a liquor store or a Subway or something, I don't remember what it was. They started building and we used to play in the dirt as kids because it took forever for them to start doing anything. And then they put the foundation up and there was rebar sticking out everywhere and it was just a mess, and then all of a sudden the building just stopped. This random foundation, dirt everywhere, the beginning of our neighborhood. It looked awful. It was an eyesore to everyone that passed by. We found out years later that the people ended up having to sell out the gas station because they threw so much money into this project but they didn't consider if they had enough to actually complete it and it just sat there for years. This random foundation, this random building is just sitting there and now all that family was known for in our town is the people that couldn't afford to finish building.

So before you jump into the Christian life, consider do you have what it takes to finish the race? Do you have what it takes to follow him? Do you have enough strength in you to lay down your own life, your own preferences, and your loved ones for him?

The second illustration is terms of surrender and do you realize that we are in wartime? Think about that for a second. We look at the Christian life as if it's just easy, that it's not really that complicated, that once we accept Christ life gets a little bit easier, which many of you in this room realize, "No, that's not the case." It gets harder. It gets more difficult and we are at war and though the war has already been won, the battle rages on. We are at war with sin and corruption of this day. We are at war with death and destruction. And we are at war with the enemy. We are at war and one does not simply head into battle unarmed and unprepared. You're not going to say, "I have no formal training, I have no weaponry but there's a fight going on and I want to join it." You're going to get the training you need. You're going to get all of the equipment you need. I think about Peter, Peter Rouse who's graduating from the Naval Academy, I think today. He's gotten a lot of training. He is more equipped to go into battle than he was when he left. But do you have what it takes to get in the war? Will you get in the fight? Will you get in the fight? Will you consider just how much this war will cost you? There is collateral damage in war. People die. Buildings get destroyed. Whole towns get destroyed. So will you get in the fight because it's going to cost you a lot? There is a cost to following Jesus and don't be like a soldier who is unprepared and ill-equipped. Get ready for the fight. That's why Ephesians 6 exists. Put on the armor of God daily. Prepare for battle every single day because it's going to be hard.

So what these two illustrations really represent is about the same thing: consider the cost of following Jesus. How much will it cost you. He gives the warnings at the outset. He doesn't give it years down the road when they've already made a decision and then he says, "Oh, by the way..." Before they ever make a decision he says, "This is the cost. The cost is high. The Christian life is hard and it will demand everything of you." So do you have what it takes to follow him or will you be like the foolish man who began to build and did not have enough? Will you be like the king who is outmatched and outgunned? If you are in Christ the answer is simple: yes, you have what it takes. You have enough. You have Christ and Christ will hold you fast. Hebrews 12:1-2, "Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witness, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, laying aside every weight and sin that so entangles us looking to Jesus." We look to Jesus because Jesus gives us the strength to carry on. One of my favorite hymns is "He will hold me fast," and it's true in the Christian life no matter how hard it gets, no matter how much it costs you, no matter how much you lose, he will hold you fast. He will carry you on. So look to Jesus because the answer to all of this is after considering the cost, do you have enough? If you are in Christ, you have everything you need. You have everything you need.

So many believers turn back when life gets hard. Something arises, small suffering, could be a big suffering, could be sickness, cancer shows up, your job gets hard and you lose your job, your marriage is falling apart, how many people just turn and run when life gets hard because they weren't prepared for how much it was going to cost them? But let's

take it a little bit further. When you put your life on the line for Jesus, when you say, "I'm following him no matter the cost," when you say, "I'm following him even though it means that my family won't follow me, even though it means that my family might kick me out of my home, or if it means that I get kicked out of my own country, or if it means I might die," in all of that we have Christ. We have everything that we need to walk this life because none of that matters in comparison to following him. Don't turn back. Lean on Christ. Trust in him. If you haven't considered the cost of discipleship, how will you respond when life changes? How will you respond? It will cost you everything but in Christ you already have what you need. Your life might be different, and it will be different, but you have Christ.

Our fourth and final requirement: surrender everything. We've looked at three requirements before this: a greater love, following him unto death, considering the cost. The last one is surrender everything. The final requirement for discipleship is the sum of everything else. If you put all three of those things together, this is the sum of it: in order to follow Jesus, in order to be his disciple, you must renounce everything. Let go of everything. It is the final question on the application to being a Christian: are you willing to let go of everything and follow him? And it's just that, this renouncing of everything is literally everything. You let go of everything. That means your family you let go, of your friends you let go of, your job, your possessions. They all now belong to him. You're laying it before him saying, "Lord, whatever my life looks like, may my job glorify you. Whatever my life looks like, may my family pursue you. It's all yours."

I think of so many missionaries like Adoniram Judson who picked up his family and moved to some of the hardest to reach places in the world where sickness met them, suffering met them, persecution met them, and he did not turn back, he did not run. He said, "We are going to be obedient to the Lord no matter how much it costs us." Ultimately for Judson it ended up costing him several wives, children, friends, family. It cost him everything, ultimately his life, but he knew that following Jesus was worth it. The cost was high but it was worth it.

So we renounce everything. We let go of everything. And my fear is that we live in a day and age so motivated by stuff that this would be hard for some of you to hear, who become addicted to our phones, our jobs, our cars, our money, whatever it is, you fill in the blank. We are motivated by getting more stuff, seeing how much we can gather and accrue in this life as if it matters. Let me just tell you it doesn't. What is the point in laying up treasure on earth where moth and rust will destroy and decay? But our world is just so motivated by this. Get as much as you can now. Get as much wealth as you can now. Have a better car. Have a better house. Have a larger family. That's a good thing but it's not our ultimate motivation. Our motivation is following Jesus, being obedient to him no matter the cost.

So we renounce everything. We say, "Everything belongs to you, O Lord." If that means one day I'm driving a really nice car and then I lose it all to go across the globe, worth it. We follow Jesus even though it's hard but he is not just concerned, Jesus is not concerned with the quantity of disciples. So many churches today are based upon how many people

can we convert? How many people can we get in the baptismal? How many people can we get to pray a prayer, sign a card, and grow our numbers to make us look good? That's not his concern here. He's got thousands of people standing right there and he lays this message down. He says, "Hate everyone else but love me. Renounce everything. Lay down your life for me. Consider how much it's going to cost you." He puts all of this out there and say, "This is what is required of you to be my disciple." He is not concerned with the quantity but the quality, the quality of the disciple. He doesn't care about a bunch of people that haphazardly make a decision that ultimately proves to not be real because they followed him based on what they could get from him. He doesn't want that. He wants people that are going to truly follow him even if it means death, truly follow him no matter the cost.

He wants to call a few who will be totally committed to following hi. We see this in his life. He's rejected by so many, so many people reject him, so many people cast him aside and say, "You're a fool." But he goes to death to save us, to save his people, and he calls us to be totally committed to him. Here are a few examples of people who have risked it all for Jesus. When Jesus called the apostles, they left their jobs and their old way of life. In one instance, they dropped their nets and followed him. They set aside everything they were accustomed to to follow him. Paul renounced his prominent way of life to suffer greatly for the millions of people that he would minister to for the mission of the gospel. Almost all of the apostles were martyred in some of the most gruesome ways possible. Stephen was stoned to death and then if you just look throughout all of church history, you see martyr after martyr after martyr dying because they refused to renounce the gospel. They renounced their own lives but they refused to renounce the gospel.

All of these people were committed to Christ Jesus. Are you committed to him? Have you considered the cost? Are you willing to lay aside your preferences, your old way of life, your own life, are you willing to renounce everything that you have to him? Renouncing everything will look differently for each one of you. This passage almost applies it a little bit differently for each one of you. For some it means leaving a work environment that doesn't glorify God. For others it will mean leaving behind friends and loved ones who are not willing to follow you as you follow Jesus. Some of you might decide that you need to pick up your entire life and go across the world to minister to a people that might kill you. A few of you might even die for the sake of following Jesus. The cost will be high but let me tell you, it is worth it. It is supremely worth it because if I'm letting go of all of my life, of all of my stuff, of everything, what do I get? Christ. He is all you need. He is all you could ever want. He is far greater than you could ever imagine. He is far more beautiful, far more lovely.

It is worth it because Christ is so far greater than anything this world has to offer. His love is so vastly superior that any other love pales in comparison. No other love will compare to the love that Christ has for us. Nothing in this world will satisfy you. I'm just going to pop that bubble real quick. Nothing will satisfy. Your job will not satisfy. There are several prominent and very rich and famous people that I think it was maybe Bill Gates that was once asked, "How much is enough?" And he said, "One penny more." And the ultimate point of that is he's never satisfied because this world can't satisfy. It

doesn't offer what Christ offers. It's not materialistic gain, it's not worldly gain, it's not worldly pleasures, it's him. And what more do you need? You get Christ and that's the point of this life is Christ. We live for Christ. We give it to Christ. We belong to him. It's worth it.

When posed with the things of this earth versus Jesus, the choice is clear, you choose Christ. When faced with a nice comfortable life or a life marked by suffering and maybe even death, the choice is clear, it is Christ. Do you love Christ with your whole life? In your whole life is he your all in all? We must let go of worldliness. We must renounce everything, even our own lives and run after Christ for as Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "Let us lay aside every weight and sin that so entangles us and run with endurance the race that is set before us fixing our eyes firmly on Christ." Knowing that as Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very soul?" This world matters not in comparison to eternity. Things that you can gain on this earth matter not in comparison to Christ Jesus.

So what will you choose? Will you choose the things of this world or will you follow him? Will you love him beyond measure, beyond anything that you could ever comprehend? Will you be willing to lay down your life? Will you consider the cost? Will you renounce everything? The cost is high but the reward is great, it's Jesus. And as Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, his own life, to gain that which he cannot lose."

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, that even though it is hard and even though it is difficult, you have given us the strength to carry on in Christ Jesus. Lord, for each one of us in this room and myself included, I pray that we would consider what this passage means, that it is not calling us to live nice, easy, comfortable lives, that it is not calling us to keep our own preferences and still attempt to follow you, it is calling us to lay it all on the line. It is calling us to lay our lives on the line for you so, Lord, whatever that looks like for each one in this room, I pray that they would wrestle with it. If there are those in this room who have not trusted in you and I am sure there are, I pray that they would consider the cost but realize the beauty of your Son and that they would follow you. I pray that we would be disciples marked by a love for you that is so vastly superior than what the rest of the world could ever comprehend because you loved us first. Lord, be with us, give us the strength. May we fix our eyes firmly on you. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen.*