

“Following Jesus is Demanding”

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There are many people in this world who refer to themselves as Christians. When someone's asked, *“what's your religion or what's your belief?”* it's rather easy to respond, *“I'm a Christian.”* But if you followed that person for a week without them knowing, and were able to see where they spend their time and money and listen to their words, would you see the person as a genuine Christian?

Saying one is *“Christian”* can almost seem or look fashionable since it certainly doesn't take a lot of effort to rattle off *“I'm a Christian.”* It's like knowing you did something wrong and quickly rattle off, *“I'm sorry”*, when you have no intention of changing and never doing it again!

Perhaps saying and embracing *“I'm a follower of Christ”* would be better and really more demanding. It's harder to follow and live out Jesus as the Lord of your life, versus living with the understanding of Jesus as Savior. **Being a Genuine Follower is Demanding!**

Look at Luke 14. As we look at these verses, it almost seems we need to remember we're dealing with a sinful, human nature! Verses 25-26, *“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “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.”*

We live in a market driven society, so it's not surprising that we feel the urge to "sell" Christianity in the marketplace of competing ideas and ways of life. But, when the Christian mission is shaped toward the "sell" mentality, it more often than not becomes a "low-cost" and "low-risk" idea. We start to think, how else will we persuade others to receive the faith, unless we come in with a lower or better offer? But truthfully, **The Christian Faith isn't a Low-cost, Low-risk Endeavor!**

As we look at verse 26, what Jesus is saying almost sounds impossible! We know Jesus calls us to love everyone around us, and here it sounds like He's saying to be willing to give up and go against even your own family! These just don't match. What especially doesn't seem to fit is the word, “hate”.

When He uses hate, He's saying we can't love everything the same. We're giving our attention and focus to whatever we love, not to what's hated, or loved less. God doesn't expect us to be cruel to the family He's given us, but rather love Him first! He has to be our priority. False priorities cripple a person's discipleship. Discipleship is difficult and needs commitment!

We Need to Count the Cost! As you walk with Jesus Christ, there are some things that have to be looked at carefully. Look at verses 28-30, *“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.”*

If you want to be firmly committed to something, you have to stay committed all the way to the end! You can't start something and give up in the middle, you have to stay focused and make sure everything is finished.

It's like saying, "I think I'm going to be a Christian. I want to learn about Jesus Christ and His love and grace more, so I'm going to go to church to worship Him and learn of Him." But you only come a few weeks, hear a few sermons, spend a little time in His Word, and then you give up going and never finish your walk of faith. You began to realize that it takes time and energy, so you quit! So, how committed are you?

Being a Follower of Christ Costs Us Everything! Discipleship is defined as giving up self-interest and competing loyalties. That means that what you might have done or believed can't be your focus anymore, and your life needs to focus on Jesus!

Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary of the New Testament, tells how in the early 1900s, a London newspaper carried an advertisement that read: "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success." The ad, signed by famous Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, brought inquiries from thousands of men.

Wiersbe suggests, *"If Jesus Christ had advertised for workers, the announcement might have read something like this: 'Men and women wanted for difficult task of helping to build My church. You will often be misunderstood, even by those working with you. You will face constant attack from an invisible enemy. You may not see the results of your labor, and your full reward will not come till after all your work is completed. It may cost you your home, your ambitions, even your life.'"*

Jesus never said being His disciple was going to be easy! From Matthew 16:24, *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'".*

Our Allegiance must be to Jesus, First and Totally! Pastor Charles Stanley wrote, *"The bottom line in the Christian life is obedience, and most people don't even like the word!"* Nothing can stand in the way of following Jesus Christ in everything we say and do. We need to do this all the way to our end on earth!

As a Disciple, We Must Carry the Cross. It should be no surprise that along with cereal sales, Christianity is in decline in America today. That's because Christianity is a religion of inconvenience, just like cereal that you have to clean up after eating! Jesus calls us to "take up our cross", that's everything, and follow Jesus' example in selfless service!

Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for our sins not His. He willingly left heaven and came here for us. Carrying the cross isn't so people feel sorry for you for suffering, it's so they see Jesus' willing example in you. It calls you to not only clean up after yourselves, but to be willing to help others do the same. There's no other religion as inconvenient as the one modeled by Christ! That's why the world isn't interested in believing and following Jesus!

Following Jesus Is an All or Nothing Proposition. Look at verse 33, *"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."* Jesus is calling people to a kind of discipleship that's not cheap, not easy, and not to be entered into without deep consideration of the consequences and costs. This passage speaks to the importance of loyalty and allegiance to Jesus over all other competing loyalties, including your family, your own self-interest, and all your possessions!

Jesus Christ has offered you, and the entire world, the opportunity of a lifetime, out of His grace. He offers you the gift of becoming a son or daughters of the Most High God, enjoying a relationship with Him, the Creator of everything, and living with Him forever. Like all relationships, following Jesus requires commitment; and all commitments require sacrifice.

Jesus sacrificed His life, endured the shame of the Cross, and bore our sins in His sinless body so that we could have life to the full! So, **What are You Willing to Sacrifice, Endure, and Bear to Live the life That Jesus Died For?**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the following comments: *“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: 'Ye were bought at a price', and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”*