

## Love Jesus Above All

Luke 14:25-27

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January 23-24, 2021

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian known for his opposition to the Nazi regime. He was imprisoned in Buchenwald and executed in 1945 for his part in a conspiracy to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

Listen to what he wrote in his classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

*“Cheap grace, is the grace we bestow on ourselves...cheap grace is grace without discipleship...costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again...it is costly because it costs a man His life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life...as we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death...when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”*

In our “*Discipleship Matters*” series, we’ve defined a disciple as *someone who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him*. Two weeks ago, we were challenged to live not according to the ways of the world, but by the truth of God’s Word. Last weekend we established love for one another as the distinctive mark of a disciple.

Here’s our approach. The sermon will be shorter (some of you want to say, ‘Amen’ while others are probably saying, ‘I’ll believe it when I see it’). The reason is because I want you to hear from Pastor Tim and Pastor Kyle as they share their hearts about the importance of intentional discipleship.

Our passage for today is pointed and powerful, stunning and shocking. These words spoken by Jesus are difficult and demanding, abrupt and offensive, and run counter to our Christian subculture. In fact, you may find yourself pushing back. Let’s resist the urge to dilute these demands and allow the full force of them to jar us out of complacent and comfortable Christianity.

Let’s stand and read Luke 14:25-27: ***“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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.’”***

Let's make two observations before diving in.

1. **This is an urgent evangelistic passage.** In context, Jesus just finished telling a parable about the importance of inviting people to His banquet. Listen to Luke 14:23: ***“Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.”***
2. **This is a demanding discipleship passage.** Jesus also gives some conditions to those who are considering following Him. The word **“disciple”** is found at the end of verse 26: ***“...he cannot be my disciple”*** and in verse 27: ***“...cannot be my disciple.”*** If you were to keep reading, you'd also find **“disciple”** in verse 33: ***“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”***

A disciple is a learner or follower and was used to describe someone who was totally committed to a cause or a person. It comes from another word which means, *“to learn by practice or experience.”* Much like an apprentice, a disciple is one who emulates the teacher. Jesus said it this way in Luke 6:40: ***“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.”***

Jesus is more interested in having committed followers than He is in drawing a crowd of fickle fans. He wanted quality over quantity. The main point He is making is while *the family is foundational, following Christ must come first.*

I see four discipleship demands in this passage.

**1. Move from the crowd to the committed core.** Luke 14:25 sets the scene: ***“Now great crowds accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them...”*** Jesus often drew crowds, but He was never interested in being popular. This phrase refers to *“many multitudes or large throngs of people.”* Luke 12:1 gives us a description of how crushing these crowds were: ***“...when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another.”*** Jesus knew many in the crowd were following Him for selfish or superficial reasons.

In the midst of all the fanfare, Jesus turns to them, which was actually a very dramatic act. It has the idea of *“twisting forcefully”* with a deliberate effort. This same word was used to describe how Jesus looked at Peter after he denied Him in Luke 22:61: ***“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter...”*** What did Jesus want to tell them? He for sure didn't give them positive memes so they could have their best life now.

**2. Prioritize faith over family.** How would you respond if Jesus spun around right now, locked eyes with you and stated: ***“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.”*** Let me remind you these words come from Jesus Himself and are intended for each one of us – ***“if anyone comes to me.”*** This is not just a call to missionaries or pastors or to the super spiritual.

Often, Jesus used figures of speech to make an unforgettable impact. An example of this kind of gripping hyperbole is Matthew 5:30: ***“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into Hell.”***

In his book called, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman writes: *“I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.”*

The crowd wanted what they thought Jesus would give them, not knowing that following Christ would cost them everything.

Let’s allow the demands of discipleship in this passage to shock and rock us. Imagine how offensive this statement would have been to those in a culture where honoring parents was the highest obligation and family was one’s greatest joy. By the way, you can’t say you have discipleship down just because you hate your sisters or your brothers!

It’s important to know a common Jewish view was the messianic era would be preceded by a time of disharmony in family relationships. With these weighty words, Jesus was announcing He was the Messiah and referencing Micah 7:6: ***“For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house.”***

The word for ***“hate”*** means to ***“detest”*** or ***“abhor.”*** Jesus is not saying we are to act in a hateful way toward our families. The Bible is clear we are to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12), husbands are to love their wives and wives are to respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33), dads are not to exasperate their kids (Ephesians 6:4), mothers are to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:4) and grown children are to care for their parents when they’re no longer able to do so (1 Timothy 5:8).

Our challenge is to understand this cultural expression without diluting the demands of discipleship. The bottom line is since there will inevitably be conflict between following Christ and family ties, we must prioritize faith over family.

The word **“hate”** in the Bible often expresses priority and preference, not emotional hatred. In Hebrew idiom, **“hate”** can mean, *“to love less.”* J. Vernon McGee offers this insight: *“A believer’s love for Christ should be such that by comparison, it looks as if everything else is hatred.”* Warren Wiersbe says, *“Our love for Christ must be so strong that all other love is like hatred in comparison.”* The stress is on the priority of love. That’s what Jesus explains in Matthew 10:37, a parallel passage: ***“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”***

In the world of the Bible, they didn’t have lukewarm words for “liking” someone; they just had two choices – “love” or “hate.” We see this in Genesis 29:30-31 where it says Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah and the next verse describes her as being hated. It’s clear Jacob loved Rachel more, so in comparison Leah was *“unloved.”* Jacob did not detest or have any hostility toward her.

Having said that, let’s not minimize the cost to your relationships with family members when you faithfully follow Christ. For some of you, your faith has already led to some family feuds.

Maybe your parents don’t understand your faith, or your spouse doesn’t share your spiritual priorities, or your children think you’re too fanatical. After Peter mentioned how much they had left in order to follow the Lord, Jesus said, in Mark 10:29-30: ***“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”***

We’re called to love and live for Christ first and foremost, even if our families don’t follow Him. Whatever you have lost because of Christ you will receive a hundred times ***“now in this time”*** brothers, sisters (I don’t want 100 sisters!) and mothers. Where do you get this many siblings and parents? In the church. Your faith family is meant to be more substantial than the genetic bonds of a physical family relationship. It doesn’t matter if you’re here by yourself, or engaging online alone, if you’re a child or a teenager, single or married, divorced or widowed, or an empty nester. We are family (no, I’m not going to sing this for you).

Before leaving the theme of faith and family, Kevin DeYoung describes two extremes related to our families.

- **Family as nothing.** He calls this the family straitjacket where the family curtails what we really want to do. In this view, kids are to be seen and not heard, or maybe not even seen.
- **Family as everything.** If the sin of parents a generation ago was to ignore their family, today it's to make children our idols.

**3. Love the Lord more than your life.** Jesus hits at the very heart of human relationships to make sure following Him comes first. Then He brings it closer to home by challenging us to lay aside our personal ambitions, goals, and our very lives: *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate...even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”* Matthew demonstrated this by leaving his old life when he was called by Jesus in Luke 5:28: *“And leaving everything, he rose and followed Him.”* It's easy to be a fickle fan; it's much more difficult to be a faithful follower.

A commitment to Christ is costly. Some time ago, I was talking to a young adult about the need to be born again. As I urged him to get saved, I asked if there was something holding him back. He answered quickly, *“Yes, commitment.”* I complimented him, telling him it's important to count the cost because becoming a Christian means dying to self and living for the Savior for the rest of your life.

**4. Fully surrender to His supremacy.** Drop down to verse 27: *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”* The word *“bear”* means, *“to take and raise up.”* Unfortunately, we have romanticized the cross and turned it into something we put on our walls or wear around our necks.

Let's remember the cross was carried by condemned criminals and ended with a humiliating and excruciating execution. Everyone knew the person was saying goodbye to everything and there was no turning back.

According to our Savior, discipleship must involve death to self – our independence, agenda and expectations (we'll drill more into this next weekend). Speaking of those who are completely committed to Christ, Revelation 12:11 says: *“...for they loved not their lives even unto death.”*

Are you willing to renounce every person, every possession and especially yourself in order to follow Christ? What is keeping you from following fully? Is it

commitment? Is it an unholy habit or an ungodly relationship? Is it a sinful pleasure?

In Pastor Ray's online Revelation class this week, he referenced the church of Ephesus that had ***"abandoned the love that they had at first."*** In Revelation 2:5, Jesus challenged them to, ***"Remember therefore from where you have fallen: repent and do the works you did at first."*** If you have lost your first love, then *remember, repent and repeat.*

I like how one pastor summarized this passage: *"Salvation is both absolutely free and yet it costs you your very life. You receive it freely at no expense to you, but once you receive it, you have just committed everything you are and have to Jesus Christ."*

The best gift you can give to your family is to make your faith and their faith your top priority!

*The family is foundational but following Christ must come first.*

1. Move from the crowd to the committed core.
2. Prioritize faith over family.
3. Love the Lord more than your life.
4. Fully surrender to His supremacy.

The way to enter the family of faith is by receiving what Jesus has done for you on the cross. John 1:12-13: ***"But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."***

The key is not who you are related to but whether or not you have repented and received Christ. Determine to follow Him as a devoted disciple for the rest of your life because when Christ calls you, He bids you to come and die.

### **Panel Discussion with Pastor Tim and Pastor Kyle**

1. Why is it important to prioritize faith over family?
2. Tell us how God has been building a passion for discipleship in your hearts?
3. You both represent different generations. Why is it important for discipleship to be intergenerational?
4. Can you give an overview of what has happened so far?
5. What's your vision for discipleship in the future?
6. Tim, tell us what went into developing the definition of discipleship?

7. Kyle, what's it like to see so many young adults practicing the spiritual disciplines?
8. Can you both share a story of how discipleship is making an impact on someone?
9. What would be a good next step for people to take?

### **New Member Introduction – Dave, Jana and Cora Bennett**

Dave is responsible for facilitating and supporting our weekend service production teams and systems (Audio, Video, Lighting, Livestream). Dave also invests his time and talent troubleshooting and improving systems in additional venues of the church (Life Center, Student Center). He has an Associate of Art's degree in broadcasting and an Associate of Science degree in electronics. He has significant experience working with church technical ministries. Dave believes that technology is key to expanding the reach of the gospel and is always looking for new ways to reach more people for Christ. Dave and his wife Jana are natives of the Quad Cities and have one daughter.

### **Announcements**