

Have you ever been invited into something and what was expected of you was either not addressed or inaccurately portrayed? My first job ever was at a Christmas tree lot. The guy who owned it told my dad I should come work for him. The job was explained as “helping out” and would be easy money for me. So, I said yes. What I quickly discovered was that it was anything but easy. First of all, one of my main jobs was to carry the trees from the lot to people’s cars. That’s understandable, but this lot was located hundreds of feet from the parking lot. Second, we sold some big trees that weighed a ton and had razor-sharp needles. No one ever said anything about gloves. The most difficult part, though, was the expectation to occasionally spend the night in the lot protecting the trees from would-be thieves. But I wanted the job and to be useful, and that was the cost I had to pay, so I did.

It is a good and gracious thing to be told exactly what to expect and what it will cost you if you want to thrive in something. In our pre-marriage class, Martha and I extol the blessings of a great marriage, but we are also very clear about what it will take from each spouse. The best personal trainer will tell you exactly what is needed to achieve your goals. We need that kind of clarity for our spiritual lives. Unfortunately, the church has done a poor job over the last few decades being clear about what it takes. In an effort to welcome people well, which is good, and in an effort to keep the seats full and not lose anyone, which is not good, many have continued to lower the bar on the call of discipleship. While we rightly and joyfully say salvation is free, we continue that theme and say “it will be easy” to follow Jesus. As I heard one pastor say, “Too many churches ask less commitment from their people than their kids’ sports teams.” This has resulted in many Christians being unaware of the true cost of discipleship, as defined by Jesus, distant from the his overwhelming love, and unprepared to serve in his Kingdom. Thankfully, Jesus himself doesn’t keep it a secret.

This morning we continue in our series called *Worth the Cost*. We are looking at some very difficult and challenging things Jesus says in Luke’s gospel about what it means to truly follow him. According to Jesus, the cost of our discipleship is **everything**. Last week, Jesus invited us to trade in the life we want for ourselves for the life he has for us, and this week, he gets into more specifics of how we do that and what the results will be if we do or if we don’t. He graciously lays it out for us because he knows it’s only when we pay the cost that he can use us for his purposes. As we go through the morning, I ask us all to prayerfully consider the question I left you with last week: What is it costing you? What cost are you paying to follow Jesus and what are you missing out on when you don’t?

To begin, I want you to see Jesus’s pattern of discipleship Luke is laying out. The problem with taking a section here or there is that you lose the context of the verses around it. This is particularly important in Luke because he wants us to see how Jesus is bringing his disciples, and us, along.

THE PATTERN OF DISCIPLESHIP IN LUKE			
	Jesus sends out the 12	9:1-6	Kingdom mission
	Jesus feeds the 5,000	9:10-17	Identity
	Peter confesses the Christ	9:18-20	Identity
	What it means to be the Christ	9:21-22	Cost
	What it means to follow Christ	9:23-27	Cost/Blessing
	Transfiguration	9:28-36	Identity
	Jesus heals boy with evil spirit	9:37-42	Identity
	Jesus predicts death again	9:43-44	Cost
	Disciples confused	9:45-50	
	Rejection by Samaritan village	9:51-56	Cost
	Cost of following Jesus	9:57-62	Cost/Blessing
	Jesus sends out the 72	10:1-12	Kingdom mission



Chapter 9 begins with Jesus sending out the Twelve apostles to proclaim the Kingdom. They’ve observed him do it and now it’s their turn. From there, he takes them through different moments of discovering a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, what it means for Jesus to be the Christ (cross), what it means to follow the Christ (cost/blessing), and then he starts the pattern over again. Deeper understanding of Jesus’s identity, Jesus’s mission, our mission, and what it will cost. He’s taking us through the same journey. Today’s passage comes after Jesus’s second prediction that he must suffer and the disciples struggling with that, for him and them. Luke is going to show us three separate encounters with would-be disciples who show us three ways to pay the cost of discipleship. Find yourself in them and what is at stake.

Following Jesus means enduring sacrifice. We’re going to have to give something up.

[Luke 9:57-58] ⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

As Jesus and the disciples were walking, a man stopped them and said, “I will follow you *wherever you go*.” It is a bold claim that says on any condition, this guy will follow. We would be inclined to applaud that kind of devotion. In fact, we would love to think we would say the same things ourselves, and we may have. When we put our faith in Christ we experienced the gift of our salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, the peace with God, the freedom to live out a new purpose in life. “Lord, I’m in wherever and however you call me.” But to that Jesus says, “Hold on. It may not be as easy as you think...”

Jesus lays out what it will cost. Following him comes at the sacrifice of comfort and security. Just look at his current disciples. They have left their homes, families, jobs, and placed their reputation in the hands of the one they follow. They go each day facing rejection and not knowing how their needs will be met. They are utterly dependent, exposed, without. And you and I are called to be willing to make that same sacrifice: everything. That could be changing where we live, leaving a job that pays more, staying home full time to raise your children, being out as a Christian in a hostile area, giving more than you've ever given before, going to places you boldly claimed you'd never go. When God called me out of the marketplace and into vocational ministry, I had to accept the loss of earnings potential, the weight of leadership, and the vulnerability of living my life publicly.

There are few idols more pervasive in our culture than comfort and security. We focus so much energy on making life easier, eradicating any adversity, and making sure everyone likes us. Inconveniences are treated as tragedies. For the Christian, we want to have our Jesus without having to give up too much. And when that happens, the things we call blessings from God become barriers to following. It's why over the centuries many who share our faith took a vow of poverty. It's not required, but there is wisdom in it. The trappings of life are intoxicating and the more stuff, comfort, security you have, the harder it is to give it up to follow Jesus. **When we don't pay the cost, it costs us.**

What is the most you are willing to give up for Jesus? Is there anything in your life that is off limits from him? **Whatever you withhold holds you back from being used by God.** But when we give them up, we make room for God to work in and through us. I will always be moved by our Outreach Pastor Cheryl Read and her husband Chris who were called by God to serve refugees and the cost they were asked to pay is to move out of their suburban home and move into Vickery Meadow. They did, and God used them mightily. What is he asking of you? Remember, there is no certainty in the circumstances of life, but only in the character of Christ. He will fill what he asks you to give up.

Following Jesus means stopping with the excuses. We are all experts at coming up with reasons to not pay the cost.

[Luke 9:59-60] ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

This time Jesus initiates. The person is willing, but he asks to first bury his father. It seems reasonable. Proper burial was a big deal in that time, so we might consider Jesus's response as harsh or unkind. But most scholars believe he is waiting for his father to die. If he was already dead, the guy wouldn't be out on the streets. If that's true, this guy is asking for an indefinite pause to Kingdom work. He has something in his life that is keeping him from being all in with Jesus, and Jesus is challenging him on it.

We are really good at putting things off. Getting in shape, reading our Bible, getting our finances in order. I've got a room that has a few unpacked boxes from when we moved. We moved four

years ago!!! That inclination makes its way into our spiritual lives. We have one excuse after another for being all in, and we've all done it. Fill in the blank: "I will start following Jesus ____." After I get out of school. After I kill it at my job. Once I get married. Once I have a baby or I get all these kids out of my house. When I retire. After I have some fun. Once soccer season is over. When things slow down (hint: that's something you can control). Once things go back to normal (hint: not something you can control). For me, it's one intense season after another. Just need to get through it, and then I'm all in.

All of those delay what is most essential. We miss out on abiding in and knowing Christ more intimately. We ignore our Kingdom assignments, fulfilling our God-given purpose. I have become very reflective about how Martha and I have disciplined our kids as one has gone to college, and another is less than a year away. We have done a pretty good job but there are things I always meant to get to but never did. I let other things get in the way. What is it for you? You know what Jesus calls many of those things? Dead. Let the dead bury the dead. Jesus is calling us to life, to proclaiming the Kingdom of God in all we say and do. To focusing on that which will last. So what is keeping you from starting? Confess that this week and ask God to help you. The time to start is now. Things don't have to be perfect. They never will be. Go.

Following Jesus means eliminating the competition. We have a million things trying to be the center of our lives. Jesus says there can be only one.

[Luke 9:61-62] ⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

The third encounter is with another who initiates. The problem is that he uses a word that is the great enemy of us paying the cost and following: But. The great qualifier. The confession of the undevoted. The enemy of being used by Christ. This guy says he will follow, BUT he's got to see his family first. Again, not a bad sentiment, but Jesus sees he's trying to hold on to an old way of life. It is ultimately a question of devotion and split priorities.

I believe the word "priorities" should be stricken from the English language. "Priority" is a word that means "of first importance", and only one thing, or person, can take that place. When we say "priorities" we really are saying "everything is important", and when everything is important, nothing is important. When we try to live with multiple priorities, we live a divided life, and Jesus says we are unfit for the Kingdom. He's saying we can't be useful.

If Jesus were to have this encounter today, he may say something like, "No one who puts his hand to the steering wheel and looks down at his phone is fit for the Kingdom of God." We've all done it. We're driving along, look at our phone, bring our eyes back up, and we've crossed seven lanes of traffic. It's dangerous and can end in accident.

It's the same thing in the Kingdom because you can't devote yourself to two things at once. You can only follow one thing at a time so when we have multiple priorities our eyes are constantly shifting and we walk in zigzag lines. Remember the two lives Jesus discussed last week, the life we want to define and the life Jesus wants to define. If we say we'll follow but look back at our

old life longingly, remembering what we had or what could have been, our heart is divided, our discipleship is double-minded, and we will not follow and serve Jesus well. It's just like in the Old Testament when God is firebombing Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife, who God graciously let escape, turned back to look at the city longingly. He turned her into a pillar of salt. Or it's like Israel. God frees them from Egypt, but what do they do when things get hard? They long for Egypt. They weren't ready to be used by God, so he marched them around the wilderness for 40 years pruning them. Jesus is warning us against looking back because we'll be split if we do and not useful for him.

The call of Jesus is not to get rid of everything in your life. It's to reorient all things under him, and that may mean cutting some stuff out. Make Jesus THE priority of your life, and he will reorder all the rest.

So that is a high cost? What do we gain if we do? Two stories: one of small cost, one of large, but both showing us that when we pay the cost, God uses us for Kingdom impact. Yesterday was Fellowship Serves. Dozens of members of our family went out and served the homeless and those in need, packed shoes, cleaned up White Rock Lake, cleaned up a food pantry and community center, wrote cards to tell people about Jesus. They paid the cost. They sacrificed their Saturday, eliminated all excuses, prioritized Jesus, and Jesus used them. We shared stories at the end of the day and one of my favorites was when someone told of engaging a homeless person and, without having to say the name of Jesus, showed that person they mattered and were loved by their creator. They followed Jesus faithfully and Jesus used them. It was a great day.

Bob and Coleen French were missionaries to the Philippines that Fellowship supported for decades. They returned home a few years ago and shared their story at our Life Group Leader Rally. It is one of obedience, sacrifice, devotion, and of paying the cost. Bob's story includes going against the wishes of his entire family, breaking off a relationship with a woman he loved, ministry failure that led to him returning home, thinking he was done. Koleen also broke off a relationship and had to endure the hardships of the mission field and overwhelming spiritual warfare while raising a growing family. They paid the cost, but in that faithfulness, they experienced the abundant love and grace of God, and God used them mightily. Bob summarized their time with this” **“However, looking back, I lost nothing of real value and gained everything that really matters.”**

You and I can have the same testimony. You are made in God's image, created to fill the earth with his glory. You are representatives of the King, and your life is a Kingdom outpost. You are ambassadors of reconciliation, the Church, the Body of Christ, called to spread the good news of the gospel and invite others to a saving relationship with him. You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared beforehand that you would walk in them. The time is now. The world is desperate, and God wants to use you. Lay your life down. Pay the cost. And let him make much of himself through you.

