

counting the cost_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 1 - Day 1 - The Cost of Being a Disciple

This is the first of six Plans on growing as a disciple of Jesus. This first Plan helps you decide whether you really are committed to being a true disciple. As Jesus made clear, being his disciple involves a challenging choice. You must weigh up the costs and benefits of serving Jesus and decide whether you are willing to sacrifice your life and desires to follow Him. This Plan will assist you in making this choice. We will start with the costs of being a disciple, but we will certainly get to the benefits.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 9:22-24

²²And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." ²³Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

Devotion

When the early followers of Jesus saw His power and heard His promise of a new Kingdom, they knew they had enlisted in something special. They expected Jesus to be welcomed by the Jewish people and to establish His rule as the new King of the Jews. For them, being a ground-floor disciple of Jesus was an exciting and potentially rewarding opportunity. As early-adopters, they were going to have important roles in this new Kingdom.

However, when Jesus explained to his followers what being His disciple was really all about, He often started with the costs, rather than the benefits. Perhaps that's because they had no idea of the costs. Jesus' Kingdom was going to be the opposite of what they expected. For Jesus, being King meant rejection and martyrdom (9:22). And for His disciples, following Him involved self-sacrifice and daily crucifixion (9:23). Jesus was crystal clear: being His disciple would be a costly business. Oh, Jesus did offer an indication of reward in 9:24, but as we consider what it means to be an everyday disciple, we will start where Jesus started here – with the cost.

Jesus described three overlapping requirements for disciples. 1. Deny yourself. Everyday disciples embrace *sacrifice*. They surrender their own agendas and desires. They give up their rights. 2. Take up your cross daily. Everyday disciples embrace *suffering*. While Jesus' audience didn't understand the deeper implications of the cross, they had seen Roman crucifixions. They knew that "taking up a cross" involved embarking on a journey of shame, pain and death. 3. Follow Jesus. Everyday disciples embrace *submission*. They genuinely seek to do what pleases Jesus. As Jesus made very clear, being His disciple is an extremely costly business. He didn't make it easy. He clearly spelt out the requirements of being His disciple. Jesus asks the same things of His disciples today. He calls for sacrifice, suffering and submission. It's a significant cost in a world that promotes freedom, pleasure, instant gratification and self-centeredness.

Prayer

I look forward to learning about the blessings of being Your disciple, but right now, help me to embrace the cost. You make it clear that being Your disciple involves crucifixion as well as resurrection. Please help me to trust You enough, to follow You and serve You no matter how costly Your call may be. I know I'm committing to sacrifice, suffering and surrender, but I genuinely have a heart to be Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 1 - Day 2 - It's Particularly Costly for the Prosperous

MORNING

Scripture: Mark 10:19-23

¹⁹[Jesus said] You know the commandments...²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Devotion

This must be one of the most heartbreaking stories in the Bible. A young man came to Jesus genuinely looking for the key to eternal life. He was a good guy who had really tried hard to keep all of God’s laws for his whole life. Jesus saw his heart and “loved him” (10:21). It’s pertinent that Mark mentions this. Jesus must have seen the incredible potential in this young man. He saw his genuine passions and desires. Followers with hearts like this young man’s were few and far between.

But the guy “went away sad” because Jesus asked him to abandon his “great wealth.” Here’s the issue. If becoming a disciple of Jesus means sacrificing everything, then the more you have, the harder that is going to be. It’s more challenging for those who are prosperous, self-sufficient and respected to become true disciples of Jesus than those who are desperate and broken. That explains why Jesus said that it was so hard for rich people to enter the kingdom (10:23). That’s because they have so much to lose.

So what does this mean for us? Jesus is not necessarily saying that giving away everything we own is a condition of being His disciple. This is just a demand He placed on this rich guy. But Jesus is saying that we need to be willing to sacrifice everything that stops us from depending on and following Him. The rich guy wouldn’t do it despite his great heart and deep desires. He weighed up the cost and it was too much for him. He went away sad, missing all that Jesus offered.

Is there anything that stands in the way of your dependence on and submission to Jesus? Is there anything that He is asking you to sacrifice? What will you do about it?

Prayer

Lord, You have given me a lot of good things and I am very thankful. But I don’t want Your blessings to stand in the way of following You. Please search my heart and reveal anything that I am clinging to more than You. Free me from my idols so that I can be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus. I’m laying it all on the line Lord. I’m Yours forever.

Today’s Bible Focus

“How hard it is for those who are prosperous to enter the kingdom of God!”

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Week 1 - Day 3 - Counting the Cost

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 14:28-33

²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ³¹“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Devotion

At this stage of His ministry, Jesus was very popular. Huge crowds were following Him around, attracted by His power and authority. But Jesus never mistook fans for followers. He knew there was a world of difference between those who were hanging out for the next miracle and those who would commit to His lifestyle and submit to His teaching for life. He kept emphasizing to the crowds that being His disciple would cost them everything they were holding on to (14:26, 33).

In this Scripture, Jesus challenges potential disciples to count the cost before committing. Not to get carried away by the excitement of the dream. Like someone erecting a tower block, you need to weigh up the cost carefully before starting to build. In the seaside town in which we live, there are several large vacant properties for sale. They were originally purchased by keen developers who despite all their effort couldn’t raise the finances to build their dreams. They are witnesses to failure. Similarly, you don’t want to get all passionate about following Jesus and then find that you’re not willing or able to keep going. That’s disappointing for everyone. As these devotions have emphasized: count the cost first.

But there seems to be a different emphasis in Jesus’s second story. Here we have a king weighing up the cost of going to war against a superior force. Perhaps in this picture, the king with 20,000 soldiers represents God. The question is, “Can you afford to take on God?” As the king about to go to war found, you’d be better off making peace while you can (14:32). We not only need to weigh up the cost of following Jesus, but also the cost of not following Jesus by rejecting His call to be a disciple. It’s a dreadful cost. No one can win in a fight against God.

As Jesus calls us to be His daily disciples, we face these two key questions: “Can I afford to give up my life to follow Jesus?” and “Can I afford to hold on to my life and end up losing everything?” It’s a huge call that we all have to make.

Prayer

It’s tempting to look for some middle path in following You, Jesus. A pathway that will give me a little more personal pleasure, freedom and control. But You never allowed for it. You kept speaking about two options: the wide path or the narrow path, building on the rock or the sand, for You or against You. Lord, as I weigh up Your invitation to be Your disciple, please give me the courage to say yes every day, knowing the cost of both following and rejecting You.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost.”

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Week 1 - Day 4 - The Benefits for Disciples

MORNING

Scripture: Mark 10:28-30

²⁸Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!” ²⁹“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

Devotion

We’ve spent three devotions exploring the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. That’s been heavy, but knowing and embracing the cost is crucial. Now it’s time, at last, to look at the benefits. As Peter watched the rich guy leaving, it struck him that he and his mates had done exactly what Jesus was asking. They had left everything to follow Him (10:28). Sure, they had not previously been millionaires, but they had chosen to make following Jesus their priority, and it had cost them everything.

Jesus assured His disciples that it would be incredibly worthwhile. Most importantly, they would receive eternal life (10:30). They would live forever with God enjoying all the blessings and goodness that God’s presence brings. This reward of eternity with Jesus far outweighs any temporary costs. God will totally remake heaven and earth and will live with us with all His beauty and blessing.

But it is what Jesus says about the present age that particularly intrigues me. He promised that His disciples would receive 100 times what they had sacrificed. Jesus can’t be speaking literally because the disciples definitely didn’t finish up with 100 homes or 100 times as many children. Jesus is describing the wonder of being filled with God’s Spirit and being part of God’s family with the relationships and resources it offers.

As a disciple of Jesus, you will benefit hugely, both now and forever. That is Jesus’ promise. Every sacrifice you make and rejection you face will be compensated a hundred times.

Prayer

I know that You will give me far more than anything I can give You. As I lay my life on the line, I receive the ancient Aaronic blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you His peace” (Num. 6:24-26). Lord, you are already pouring out the riches of heaven on me, and there is so much more yet to come. I’m glad that I’m Your disciple forever.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Those who sacrifice will receive a hundred times as much.”

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Week 1 - Day 5 - A Great Investment

MORNING

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Devotion

We don't have to worry too much about moths and vermin destroying our earthly treasures (although I do have a few T-shirts with moth holes in them), but with all the scams around, we certainly have to watch out for thieves. Some people sadly have lost their life savings to criminals. Jesus is making the point that anything we accumulate on earth is incredibly transitory. There are some benefits for us in collecting stuff, but they will be short-lived. As Job rightly said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart” (Job 1:21). At the very most, we have our treasure until we die. Certainly, everything that we have achieved and amassed on earth will be left behind. Every single thing. Treasures on earth are temporary.

On the other hand, everything we do for Jesus and others will last forever. As you serve Jesus today, you are building up “treasure in heaven” that will be remembered and celebrated forever. None of the sacrifices you make for Jesus will be overlooked or disregarded. You have probably forgotten most of your ordinary acts of service, but God hasn't, and He never will. They will bring joy to His heart and your heart forever. This puts the sacrifices involved in being a disciple of Jesus into perspective. Everything you do for God matters. Everything counts for eternity. The blessing of your treasure in heaven will last forever, bringing huge joy to Jesus, to others, and to you.

We don't live as disciples to make sure we have treasures in heaven. We do it to please Jesus. But be assured that nothing you do as a disciple is wasted or forgotten. Not now or forever. Keep depositing those “treasures in heaven.” They will all bring eternal blessing.

Prayer

It's incredible to think that everything I do for You and others will count forever. What a privilege to serve and give and love and forgive. These things not only please You now, but they will please You for eternity. My attitudes and actions will be cause for celebration in the new heavens and earth. That makes my ordinary life now very significant. Please help me to live as Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

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Week 1 - Day 6 - A Living Sacrifice

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Devotion

Paul does not use the word “disciple” in his letter to the Romans, but he captures the concept here in the phrase “living sacrifice” (12:1). We have seen that disciples of Jesus sacrifice their agendas, priorities and securities, to follow and obey Jesus. While the reward is huge, the cost is significant.

It can be painful and distressing to abandon things that make our lives secure, enjoyable, and respected by others. Living as an everyday disciple is like climbing up on an altar and offering ourselves as a sacrifice to Jesus every day. It's a great way to live. It brings huge pleasure to God (12:1) and blessing to us, and will make a difference forever. But it is costly. So Paul's choice of “living sacrifice” is a helpful and accurate picture of a disciple.

According to Paul (12:2), being a disciple involves a transformation in us that causes us to think differently from the world and enables us to receive and follow God's will. As we abandon our personal priorities, God gets hold of our mind and renews it. We start to think like God does. We see people differently. We experience different longings. Different things satisfy us. Over time, our daily acts of sacrifice become a joyful surrender to Jesus who we love and trust.

I hope you have now made a firm commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus, understanding both the demands and blessings. In the next four Plans in Everyday Disciple, we will explore how to grow as a disciple.

Prayer

I climb back up on the altar and offer myself to You again. I just want to serve and please You. I trust You with my life and future. Keep transforming my mind so that I will see what You see, love what You love, and break free from the attraction of this world. Show me Your will and I will do it. May I live as Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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