

A Costly Call

Bible Background • MARK 1:16–20; LUKE 14:25–33

Printed Text • MARK 1:16–20; LUKE 14:25–33 | Devotional Reading • PHILIPPIANS 3:7–1

Aim for Change

In today's lesson we will: UNDERSTAND the cost of being Jesus' disciple; AFFIRM the call to be disciples who make disciples and face hard choices; and RECOGNIZE our need give up things to follow Jesus as members of His church.

In Focus

Sampson and his grandfather Lee sat on the porch talking about Sampson's decision to join the military after college. Lee was proud that Sampson would make the commitment, like he had, to serve their country. Sampson asked, "Grandpa, why did you join the military? Why did you go?"

Lee thought a moment and answered, "Well, in my day, young men were getting drafted into the Army for the war. But by the time I came of age, the draft was over. I decided to enlist, though, because I knew I should serve my country even if there was no war. I don't think we should wait on a war to help; we should serve because it is the right thing to do. But no one told me the cost of serving."

Sampson asked, "What do you mean?"

Lee replied, "I had to leave home immediately. I missed the birth of your mother and didn't get to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with the family. It was an honor, don't get me wrong. But when you serve, your service becomes the priority."

Sampson said, "That's what Mom says about the church. She has made it her priority to make sure God's people are cared for. She has missed soccer games and dinners. But I know that she is serving for a purpose bigger than herself and that comes at a cost."

How has serving the mission of the church cost you? Have you ever had to make some sacrifices and miss out on events? What has been the reward?

Keep in Mind

"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Cross stauros (Gk.) — An instrument of capital punishment, usually wooden.

B. Follow akoloutheo (Gk.) — To accompany, specifically as a disciple.

Say It Correctly

None

KJV

Mark 1:16 Mark 1:16 Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

19 And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. Luke 14:25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

NLT

Mark 1:16 One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.

17 Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

18 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

19 A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets.

20 He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men. Luke 14:25 A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them,

26 "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else— your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.

27 And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

28 But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?

29 Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you.

30 They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'

31 Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him?

32 And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away.

33 So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."

The People, Places, and Times

John the Baptist. Little is known about the early years of the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. The prophets declared that John would precede the Messiah and that his purpose was to call the Jews to repentance and prepare them to receive the Messiah (Isaiah 40:1–8; Malachi 4:5–6). He was a prophet held in high regard who led a revival in Judea that prepared the people to receive Jesus’ message. The Gospel of Luke records that John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin. John was a holy and righteous man who was wrongly executed by the state. His life was characterized by self-denial, humility, and holy courage. In his humility, he declined the honors that an admiring crowd wanted to confer upon him and declared himself to be no one, merely a voice calling people to repent because the kingdom of God was near.

Capernaum. This was the residence of Jesus and His apostles and the scene of many miracles and discourses, including His first sermon. Jesus spent His childhood at Nazareth, but Capernaum was His ministry headquarters. This city was located in Galilee, one of three provinces in Palestine, along with Judea and Samaria.

What have you avoided in order to follow Christ more fully?

Background

The Gospel according to Mark is a powerful, yet brief, account of the life of Jesus Christ. The beginning of Mark’s Gospel differs from Matthew and Luke, as it does not have a detailed birth narrative. It begins with the story of John the Baptist, who prepares the way for Jesus. When Jesus enters the narrative, He initiates His ministry by calling in reinforcements. Jesus understands that ministry is not meant to be a solitary mission in search of understanding. Ministry is a fellowship of those who share a common goal and purpose of doing God’s will and serving God’s people. It is important to follow this procedure so that we, as believers, can imitate and produce those greater works that Jesus talked about (John 14:12). In these few verses we must be intentional about exploring Jesus’ plan, pathway, and process for enlisting more disciples into the fold of Christianity.

Have you ever shared the Gospel of Jesus with someone who was following a different plan? What did you realize about yourself when you started the process of sharing the Good News with another person?

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Had a Plan (Mark 1:16; Luke 14:25–27)
2. Jesus Created a Pathway (Mark 1:17–18; Luke 14:28–30)
3. Jesus Had a Process (Mark 1:19–20; Luke 14:31–33)

In Depth

1. Jesus Had a Plan (Mark 1:16; Luke 14:25–27)

Notice the context in which Jesus approaches His soon-to-be disciples. Jesus meets them in a place where they are already working toward a pre-planned purpose. They are fishing as they have always done, and Jesus calls them in the midst of their work. The Sea of Galilee is the stage for many of Jesus’ acts in ministry; but at the start, Jesus finds His first disciples there.

The reality is that most of us do not have a plan when we invite people to our faith. We “go” as instructed in Matthew 28:19 but sometimes have little idea of what to share, or do not have correct information. We can

wrongly assume that those we are sharing the Gospel with have had no experience with hearing it, but that is usually not the case these days. Anyone can Google what we are talking about and challenge what we claim to be truth. Therefore we must follow the plan set by Jesus.

But there is a cost to following that plan. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells the crowd that possessions and family can keep them from ultimately following the path marked for discipleship. As disciples we must earnestly pursue God, but at what cost will we follow Jesus Christ? Many adults admit they might lose friends and family members when they make the decision for Christ. But others sell their discipleship and morals short to gain notoriety and worldly possessions.

Being a disciple of Christ is easier said than done. Once we choose to be a disciple of Christ, we choose to be subject to God's specific will for our lives even in those good and bad, wanted and unwanted, favorable and unfavorable days and moments in life. But the outcome will be far greater than the sacrifice made in our discipleship.

Has Jesus ever interrupted your normal operations and plans and used you to complete a new task?

2. Jesus Created a Pathway (Mark 1:17–18; Luke 14:28–30)

Upon greeting the brothers Peter and Andrew, Jesus says, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." Jesus makes an intriguing call for the brothers to follow Him, and they could only assume that the man calling them had a plan. Jesus made it clear that once we follow, He will send us out to fish. Jesus' pathway is made clear when He implies that He has the way to fill our discipleship nets with more people. Anyone who fishes knows that fishing can be time-consuming. There is a right way and a wrong way to catch fish. You must be patient, have the right bait, and realize that there is more than one spot to find what you are looking for.

In one sentence Jesus gives the pathway to executing the task He gives us. First, we must come. We must take up our necessary bait, i.e., fellowshiping with Jesus ourselves while also leaving behind some things that are not needed for the trip. Second, we must follow Jesus. There were probably many other fishermen out on the sea that day, but none presented a new place and purpose for the brothers. To follow Jesus requires a devoted sense of call.

Jesus uses the imagery of a builder looking to build a tower in Luke's Gospel. This desire to build is not for personal gain or glory but it is for others to see and marvel. Jesus says we must count all costs of loss and labor as they are necessary to completing the work. No major construction can be done without first itemizing the cost of labor and supplies. We, as the disciples, must also recognize that there is a cost to our labor. We will sometimes become discouraged, especially if we are looking at other towers being built around us, while trying to erect our own. Furthermore, there will be a cost for use of supplies. Our supplies as disciples will be the blood, sweat, and tears of maintaining our personal relationship with God while living in a world that is not so friendly to our proclamation.

When you came to know Jesus, what things did you leave behind—or try to—so that you could follow Him wholeheartedly?

3. Jesus Had a Process (Mark 1:19–20; Luke 14:31–33)

Jesus did not stop at the two brothers when fishing for people. He kept walking and saw James and John who also were preparing to begin their daily work. "Without delay he called them" (from v. 20). The sense of immediacy shows us that this was Jesus' plan from the beginning. The slightest hesitation could have caused the disciples to miss their assignment. When Jesus calls, we should not hesitate to answer. There is no reason for us

to delay the work of God; souls are ready to encounter Christ now. It is our job to call more people into fellowship with Jesus so that they can go forward with their new lives.

Realizing that the work of discipleship cannot be done alone, Jesus draws on the imagery of a king contemplating war and utilizing his military personnel to devise a strategy. Jesus shares with us through this illustration that calling in reinforcements to aid in the battle plan is a wise idea. While it may seem easier to go alone, it is not wise because the enemy of our souls seeks to devour the weak and isolated. We need to pray for, build up, and encourage one another to ensure that we are fulfilling God's complete work for our lives.

What keeps you from being called into fellowship with other believers? What do you believe is your main distraction from following Jesus' call?

Search the Scriptures

1. Jesus' ministry began in a simple fashion. He even called simple working people to get His ministry started. Why did Jesus call these working-class citizens to major ministry jobs?
2. The Scriptures do not show Jesus being forceful when calling His followers. Why do many Christians now take power-driven approaches to gaining disciples? Do you think this is what causes many to ignore our faith?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What has being a disciple of Jesus cost you? What have you had to give up for the sake of service to the kingdom?
2. What sacrifices did Jesus make in service to the kingdom while He was on earth? How do we find comfort in the sacrifice of Christ as we move to make our own?

Liberating Lesson

Some believe God only calls those who are of a certain social status. But it is clear in these selected verses that Jesus calls anyone who is willing to come and follow.

What would the world be like if more people were willing to humble themselves and follow the teachings of a carpenter's son? How would our communities change if more people knew that Jesus came from Nazareth, the poverty stricken area that did not produce royalty by society's standards? Jesus called other unlikely people to participate in His work of sharing the Good News of God's salvation and resisting injustice. It is liberating to know that God does not play favorites but is looking for those willing to follow Jesus.

Application for Activation

The Bible is clear in its theme of fellowship. The South African philosophy "ubuntu," meaning "I am because we are," teaches us the same principle that Jesus taught His followers. We are not to be Christians only for the sake of being saved ourselves. We are called to bring others to the saving power of Jesus, sharing that there is a better life awaiting us all. Far too often Christians individualize faith, forgetting about the many others who Jesus is also calling to relationship. After accepting our relationship with Jesus, we often pursue the things that God can provide—forgetting that we must reach back for those who could also benefit from God's love. We should never limit God to being solely ours to know because God is too big for any of us to contain. The Bible teaches us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Some Christians act as though they alone are chosen by God. But we cannot and should not limit God to only wanting us and no one else. All are welcome in the kingdom of God, and it is up to us to help them get there with our speech and behavior.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Mark 1:16–20 16

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. 18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

As Jesus passes along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, He sees two brothers, Simon and Andrew, fishing. Mark does not tell us whether these brothers had any encounters with Jesus prior to this time (see John 1:35–42); he does not tell us how big their fishing business is. The only information Mark relays is that, seeing these brothers casting their net, Jesus invites them to follow Him. Fishing was common in the region because fish were plentiful. Without hesitation, Simon and his brother abandon their nets and follow Jesus. In His invitation, Jesus tells them that they will be fishing for people, rather than fish. Mark uses the adverb “straightway” again (cf. v. 10) to describe how quickly the two brothers accepted the invitation. That means when Jesus asks them to follow Him, they at once left their nets and followed Jesus. The word “follow” is the Greek word *akoloutheo* (ah-koe-loo-THEH-oh), which means to accompany, specifically as a disciple.

19 And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. 20 And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

As He walks a little farther, Jesus sees brothers James and John fishing with their father and their servants. Jesus extends the same invitation to them. James and John respond immediately, leaving their father and their servants and follow Jesus. The mention of the “hired servants” suggests that Zebedee’s fishing business might be a big one, but how big is not indicated. Mark also seems to indicate that the brothers are not leaving their father alone to run the business by himself. However, the main point here is the immediate response the brothers give to Jesus’ call, just as in the case of Simon and Andrew. This call also demonstrates the cost of discipleship, which includes not only abandoning everything to follow Jesus, including material wealth from their father, but also breaking the family ties.

Luke 14:25–33 25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

There were those even among the elite who were willing to accept the challenge to be humble; after all, how difficult could it be to honor others and temporarily refrain from being the center of attention? As for the

masses, is there any doubt that they joyously and hopefully responded to Christ when He concluded His parable? (Read Luke 14:21–24.) Allegiance to Christ is about being a disciple, and becoming a disciple of Christ is like the melting ice in a glass of water. Slowly the form of the ice is lost and the ice takes on the properties of the water in which it was placed. This is our calling.

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Grammatically speaking, these are conditional sentences. That should not lead us to conclude, however, that discipleship is optional for the Christian. There are two words used to introduce conditional sentences in the Greek. If (Gk. ean, eh-AN) you do this or if this is true, this MIGHT happen or be true, or if (Gk. ei, AY) you do this or if this is true... this WILL happen or these are the facts. There is the “if” of probability, and the “if” of certainty. Christ completely understands the soul-stirring statement He is about to make.

Christ says if you choose, if you make a decision to follow, to enter into a relationship with Him, then these are the conditions: If you do not hate your father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters and even own life, you cannot be His disciple. This is not a verse inviting us to hate our families or ourselves. God is love and desires that we love ourselves, our families and our neighbors as God loves us (Luke 10:27, Matthew 19:19.) However, this is a verse that prioritizes our relationship with Jesus as most important in our lives, the relationship that takes preeminence over everything else. As far as Christ is concerned, the only response they should have to saving grace is to define their reason for living not by their relationships with others or even their own sense self but by their relationship to Him.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

There are some who suggest this saying is just a parabolic phrase that eludes to Christ’s listeners and many in the church today. However, to “bear” means to endure and carry, and here it suggests a necessary unity between the load being carried and the burden bearer (cf. Luke 22:10; Acts 9:15; Galatians 6:2). Moreover, only in a few occasions outside the Bible does the word cross (Gk. stauros, stow-ROCE) mean anything other than the instrument of capital punishment—most often a wooden stake used to torture and inflict unimaginable pain. When Christ says that we must bear our cross, He is saying, without qualification, that disciples must carry the thing that tells the world that they are ready to die to all that does not come from Him.

The “his” in “his cross” is a reflexive pronoun (Gk. heauto, heh-ow-TOE) that conveys a relationship of mutual possession; in this case between the would-be disciple and the cross. Using contemporary language, the one who refuses to bear the cross assigned by God cannot be His disciple. This is a difficult undertaking and maybe the reason Paul said, “I die daily” (from 1 Corinthians 15:31). Taking up our cross is a daily and persistent calling and a mark of being His disciple. It is not finished at conversion with the stopping of a few bad habits and personal agendas. The word for “bear” is a present active verb. We never stop bearing the cross of pain and suffering this side of heaven when we are Jesus’ disciples. We may make light of these words, but Jesus’ audience probably did not. Some surely would have seen and heard the cries and pain of someone bearing a cross.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Just as one should not begin the construction of a building without knowing what it will take to finish, so Jesus instructs the crowd not to begin the disciple’s journey without reflecting on what it will take to finish.

The word for “count” used here suggests counting with the intent of fully understanding the consequences, good or bad (cf. Revelation 13:18). Not being a disciple is to have no other option but to depend on other fallible human beings for acceptance and guidance. To be a disciple is to have the assurance that the One who knows all

has covered all the bases and always has the greatest good properly in focus. Yet it comes at a high price of sacrificing comfort, convenience, gains, pleasures, and position in the world to follow God's will. That is not to say we are called to be poor or lacking but that whatever we have is subject to Christ instead of our own desires. The world would say, "Count what you have in your hand." Christ would say, "Count what I have in My hand." The decision you make will change your life and where you spend eternity. Be sure to calculate carefully.

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, 30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

We should not think the church makes coming to Jesus too easy. Redemption is free. There is no price to pay, no work to do. God did it all. Our salvation is by grace and that through faith; it is a gift of God (see Ephesians 2:8). Christ has not stated that this is what you must do to become His disciple. He has said if you follow Him, this is what it means to be His disciple. "Faith without works is dead" (from James 2:20). Pretending to have a relationship with Christ where none exists only leads to public ridicule. The Holy Spirit enables us to be disciples as we yield to God's will, because any discipleship we try to do on our own we do not have the ability to complete.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

At first glance, these few verses in our lesson appear to be a restatement of all that has been said before. Using the phrase "cannot be my disciple" (v. 27) to structure our exposition at this juncture helps demonstrate that these verses are not just thrown in. Rather, Christ has moved us from one level of understanding of the call of the disciple to another. In verse 26 Christ addresses the issue of what it means to be a disciple. In verses 27–30 Christ discusses a need to reflect on the costs of being a disciple. In these last few verses, Christ challenges us in our mission as disciples.

Using contemporary language to paraphrase verse 31, we could say that when we are on the job and there are more against us than for us, are we willing to go all the way for Jesus? If God calls us to a ministry in a drug-infested community, are we willing to hang in there regardless? Do we see opportunities for manifestations of God and His glory when the enemies of our minds, hearts, and souls surround us? Christ rhetorically answers these questions in these verses. We should not quickly jump on the discipleship bandwagon unless we have a clear idea of what the cost entails.

The phrase "going to make," as translated by the King James Version, may state the king's actions as being more aggressive than the Greek warrants. The word for "going to make" is *poreuomai* (Gk. *poe-REW-oh-my*), which could be translated as becoming involved. Disciples are at war with the world. The world is at war with Christ (see John 15:18). The question is "Do we want in?" Jesus was clearly aware that resisting Roman oppression as Jews and later Christians would cost many disciples their comfort or their lives. One could follow Him at that cost, or compromise with the Roman Empire and fall with it. A good parallel for this passage is the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16: Either we do what is right and follow Christ despite the battles to come, or we make friends with the world and accept the defeats and fate of the world. We cannot be lukewarm or bystanders in discipleship.

The Greek word *bouleuo* (*boo-LEW-oh*) means "to consider, to converse, or debate," and *kathizo* (Gk. *kah-THEED-zo*) means "to sit down." The sitting down comes before the consulting. Christ is saying that accepting the call to be a disciple is a matter of careful thought and unhurried reflection, in order to fully digest all that is at stake. There are many barriers in life to being a disciple. Some barriers are relational (cf. v. 26) and some are circumstantial (cf. vv. 28–32).

Christ's followers should be fully aware that becoming a disciple is a costly endeavor and not to be entered into lightly. Being a disciple changes us and affects everything around us.

Notice well that Christ has moved from illustrations directed at families, to full communities, and on to a significantly larger group. Those who ignore the mandates of discipleship put themselves and everybody around them in a position to be hurt. While the enemy is a long way off, a wise king will "ask" (Gk. erotao, eh-ro-TAH-oh), or literally request or beg, for peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

When Jesus wraps up His discourse with "so likewise," He may very well be referring to all that has been said in chapter 14. What a wonderful and gracious term Luke uses to cite the Lord's statement here in verse 33 and in the following phrase. The Greek word apotassomai (ah-poe-TASS-so-my) is used six times in the New Testament and means to say "goodbye" before a significant separation. Are we willing to say goodbye to everything for the sake of the King and His kingdom? Christ's disciples are to say goodbye to all means not provided by God to attain and maintain a personal sense of worth and purpose in this world. Whether it is a job, a person, a ministry, or self (cf. v. 26), we cannot experience the fullness of what it means to be Christ's disciple without sacrifice. Those who are not willing to view relationships from Christ's vantage point—who do not carry their own cross, who do not consider the cost, and who are not willing to lay down their lives so that Christ might give them life more abundantly—cannot fully be His disciple.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Answering the Lord's Call of Discipleship
(Mark 4:10–20)

TUESDAY

It's Hard to Enter the Kingdom
(Mark 10:23–31)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Call and Family Conflict
(Matthew 10:34–39)

THURSDAY

The Father Honors Those Who Follow
(John 12:20–26)

FRIDAY

Suffering and Knowing Christ Jesus
(Philippians 3:7–16)

SATURDAY

Faithful Witness Through Suffering
(2 Corinthians 6:1–10)

SUNDAY

Counting the Cost, Answering the Call
(Mark 1:16–20; Luke 14:25–33)