



## Week 10: It's Costly, But It's Worth It Luke 14:25-33

### GOAL:

To consider the high cost of following Jesus and to recognize the unsurpassable value that comes with it.

### CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Remind everyone of the Grow Group schedule surrounding Holy Week and Easter. Sunday groups will meet 3/24. All groups will attend Table to the Cross together on 3/28 at 7pm. And weekday groups will meet April 1-3.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at [vrbc.net/grow](http://vrbc.net/grow).
- Remind your group about the upcoming Christmas Store Auction & Bingo Night on April 18. (Someone will be coming to your group to share details in the next few weeks.) Invite your group to attend and participate together!

### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

*Jesus, we are grateful that you extend a wide and gracious offer to follow you and experience life in your Kingdom. Help us to recognize that this big invitation comes with a big challenge, that of denying ourselves, putting you in first place, relinquishing everything else, and giving our lives to passionately follow you. Help us not to water down the gospel or diminish its claims but to see the surpassing worth of knowing and following you. By your grace, help us to see that life in your Kingdom is worth going all in. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## DISCUSS

**Leaders:** In this week's Grow Group lesson, we are continuing with our study of Luke's parables. However, Sunday's sermon will be a standalone Palm Sunday message from guest speaker JoAnn Hummel. Because we will not have a related sermon to draw from for our discussion, we are providing you with a more in-depth exposition of the Scripture passage in the leader's content below. Let's dive in!

### **Read Luke 14:25-33.**

- What is the point Jesus makes in these verses about life in God's Kingdom? What is the cost of following Jesus?

**Leaders:** Jesus is making the point that we can't live as citizens of the world and also as citizens of God's Kingdom. There is no "dual citizenship." We may try to have it both ways, but it's not meant to be that way. In the preceding chapter (Luke 13:25-27), Jesus warned that some people will say at the last judgment, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets," and Jesus will respond, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me." The large crowds of people following Jesus need to know that there is a big difference between just going along with Jesus and really being a disciple. It's not enough to just hear his teaching, see his miracles, and eat with him. It's not about just living a respectable life and going to church on Sundays. Following Jesus is an all-in way of life.

In this passage, Jesus outlines several costs:

- The priority of family relationships (verse 26)
- A comfortable and self-satisfying life (verse 27)
- Wealth and material possessions (verse 33)

Let's address each in turn. We will address the second cost, that of carrying the cross and relinquishing comfort and self-satisfaction, with its own question in just a moment. So let's consider the first and third costs now.

First, we cannot take Jesus' words in verse 26 to be a literal command to hate our family members. Jesus has already told them to love even their enemies (Luke 6:35), and shortly after this, Jesus will remind them of the commandment to "honor your father and mother" (Luke 18:20; cf Exodus 20:12). Nor can we ignore or dismiss Jesus' words. So we must wrestle with Jesus' meaning. Jesus used a Semitic expression to convey indifference to one thing and preference for another. For example, "I love A and hate B" means "I prefer A to B." Or in other words, "I love B less than I love A." Jesus will soon say in Luke 16:13, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." In Luke 14:26, Jesus is essentially asking whether we will serve him in the number one place as Lord (which means "master"). While our natural affections might incline us to say, "My family comes first," Jesus is saying that our love for him is to take precedence over all other loves. This is radically counter-cultural. If we are to take Jesus seriously on this, how might it affect the priorities we set for our children? How might it affect our

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family commitments and schedules? In what ways might we be prioritizing our children's "happiness" and achievements over our family's devotion to Jesus and to serving God's Kingdom?

In verse 33, Jesus is asking us to say goodbye to our attachment to and accumulation of wealth and material possessions. In fact, it is worth noting the all-inclusive emphasis in the original Greek text. Each and every person (πᾶς, meaning "every" or "all") must give up each and every thing (πᾶσιν). This is not the first or the last time that this is required of Jesus' disciples. Simon, James, and John (Luke 5:11) and Levi (Luke 5:28) left everything to follow Jesus. Peter also tells Jesus, "We have left all we had to follow you!" (Luke 18:28). This does not mean that they starved. The disciple who leaves everything to follow Jesus will find food and shelter along the way (Luke 10:7) and will pray for daily rations, trusting in God's provision (Luke 11:3, 9-13). But Jesus does ask his disciples to "give to everyone who asks" (Luke 6:30). Twice Jesus asks people to sell their possessions and give the money to the poor—once to his disciples (Luke 12:33) and once to a rich man (Luke 18:22). And the book of Acts shows us that this lifestyle of sacrificial generosity continues in the life of the church after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:45; 4:34). In a world of profit-seekers and consumers, and a culture obsessed with "keeping up with the Joneses," Jesus' followers are expected to live differently.

- What does taking up the cross (verse 27) symbolize in the context of discipleship? How does this idea resonate with Jesus' disciples then and now?

**Leaders:** We can understand Luke 14:27 in light of Luke 9:23, in the context of self-denial. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Our natural tendency is toward self-gratification: we do what we want, say what we want, and get what we want. But Jesus' says that the way of the cross is the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial. And it's not because Jesus wants us to live miserable, wretched lives. It's because the things we are grasping for are deceptively flimsy and empty and disappointing, and the way of life that Jesus offers us is surprisingly rich and fulfilling. In *The Message* paraphrase of this Scripture, Jesus says, "Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"

Jesus' first-century listeners would have taken Jesus' call to bear the cross very literally. That was the punishment for going against the Roman Empire. It was considered the ultimate punishment. They wouldn't have heard the phrase, "I guess that's my cross to bear," as a euphemism to complain about extra responsibilities or carrying some burden. It was a call to place your actual lives on the line as a consequence of following Jesus. Today, in our Western culture, most of us are not risking our lives to follow Jesus. But for some people around the world and even in our own community, the risk is very real. They might be shunned, persecuted, or martyred for their faith. Jesus' words in Luke 14:27 let us know that following Jesus is costly, and it could possibly cost us everything, even our very lives. But it is important to note, as David Garland points out, "Jesus expects nothing that he has not already accepted for himself." This Palm Sunday and Holy Week, we remember that Jesus didn't count the cost, but gave himself completely.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus made plain that the expectation of taking up your cross is not a once-in-a-lifetime possibility. It's a daily expectation, an ongoing quality of a life of following Jesus. Jesus calls us to

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wake up every day and once again deny our insatiable desires for getting more, for having our own way, for insisting upon our rights, and for living to please ourselves. And instead, he calls us to follow his own example of denying ourselves, sacrificing ourselves for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of others, and adopting the same generous and self-giving way of life that Jesus lived.

- What does Jesus mean in verse 27 when he says “you cannot be my disciple?”

**Leaders:** Jesus is not saying in Luke 14:27 that he won’t let you be his disciple because you’re not good enough. Following Jesus doesn’t mean stacking up a high enough list of spiritual accomplishments, as we saw last week. Instead, Jesus is saying that you can’t be his disciple because that’s not what being a disciple means. You’re on the wrong path.

*Picture someone who is a self-described Cowboys fan, but they don’t have any of Cowboys shirts or paraphernalia, they never watch the games, and they don’t know any of the players. I think we could safely say that they couldn’t legitimately be called a Cowboys fan!*

*In the same way, it’s impossible to “dabble” in following Jesus. Jesus can only truly be your Lord and Savior if Jesus is the #1 love and pursuit of your life, to the point where all else pales in comparison. Jesus’ words are sobering—intentionally so. They are meant to show us the folly of thinking that we can cherry-pick the parts of life as a Christian that are most pleasing to us and leave the rest for the super-Christians. No, Jesus says to the crowd of people, these are the entrance requirements: nothing less than giving your life to follow Jesus.*

*For those of us who have been following Jesus for some time, it is helpful to take a fresh look at our lives with Jesus’ words in mind. Yes, these are entrance requirements, but they are also meant to describe the ongoing quality of disciples of Jesus. In a way, they are a Christian’s “performance standards.” How do our lives today line up with Jesus’ call to daily carry our cross? Richard B. Vinson says, “If there were an annual evaluation for Jesus’ disciples, these [metaphors or parables in this passage] would be three of the review categories; how do we rate in these areas?” Remember, we are not being rated on our deeds, but on our wholehearted devotion and passionate pursuit of Jesus.*

- What do you think Jesus means in verse 28 by “complete it”? How do verses 28-31 relate to following Jesus?

**Leaders:** Jesus is trying to warn those who might make a cavalier decision to be a disciple but can’t see it through, and instead gives up on their faith. Jesus issues this warning out of love, not to drive fear. The crowds who are following Jesus are caught up in the excitement of his impressive teaching and miracles. They might be quick to jump on the “Jesus bandwagon,” but Jesus wants them to really understand what that means. As we’ve said, following Jesus isn’t something that can be done halfheartedly. It is a complete reorientation of a person’s priorities, loves, and agendas.

*Luke and Ethan Bivens are young adults who grew up at VRBC and are now serving as*

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## WEEK 10

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*VRBC-supported missionaries at Texas A&M with an organization called Student Mobilization. They are building intentional friendships and doing life-on-life ministry in order to raise up passionate disciples of Jesus. In their prayer newsletters, they often ask us to pray for someone by name, saying, “[this person] is really considering whether it’s worth it to go all in with Jesus.”*

*Those of us who grew up in the US have become accustomed to “cultural Christianity,” where it is common to hold to particular moral standards, celebrate Christian holidays, and go to church because it is a cultural or societal norm rather than as a natural outgrowth of a passionate pursuit of Christ. But Jesus says this is a partially erected tower. It’s not useful; it’s futile. It’s not accomplishing its purpose.*

*If “going all in with Jesus” sounds hard, you’re right. That’s the whole point of what Jesus is saying here. But if it sounds impossible or unobtainable, think again. Jesus talked about “faith the size of a mustard seed” (Matthew 17:20) to emphasize the value of even a small beginning. It’s not the size of our faith that matters most but the size of the one in whom we have faith. When Jesus urges us to “complete it” in Luke 14:28, he is not saying “be good” or “work harder.” He is saying that what he has for us is so much better than what he’s asking us to let go of that it is 100% totally worth going all in.*

- How can we reconcile Jesus’ high bar for discipleship with salvation as a free gift by God’s grace offered to anyone who will receive it?

**Leaders:** *The preceding parable of the wedding banquet invites a wide sweep of people (14:23). And all are invited to experience and accept God’s grace. In John 3:16, Jesus makes the offer to “whoever believes in him.” All are invited by God’s grace into a new, abundant life with Jesus. But with this gracious offer comes certain demands. Discipleship is not just about showing up. It is not an invitation to ease and comfort. It’s an invitation to daily carry the cross of Jesus.*

*So how do we reconcile the two things? Life with Jesus is both “high invitation” and “high challenge.” Dallas Willard famously points out, “Grace is not opposed to effort; it’s opposed to earning.” Ephesians 2 highlights this dichotomy: “For it is by grace you have been saved...it is the gift of God,” and we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” Paul assumes the same complex relationship of grace and works in Philippians 2:12-13, when he says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.” And in the next chapter, Paul says, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”*

*Jesus casts a wide net and offers his grace and love to all who will receive it. But receiving it comes with a high cost: the uncompromising sacrifice of daily denying ourselves and taking up our cross, and the single-minded devotion and dogged tenacity of valuing and pursuing Christ above everyone and everything else.*

- What risk do we run by sharing a gospel that minimizes or downplays the cost of following Jesus? What are we missing out on by refusing to let go of something else?

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**Leaders:** As we saw with the parable of the soils, if we don't take Jesus' teaching seriously, then we are like the seed on shallow soil who gives up when life gets hard. If we expected following Jesus to be easy, when we face challenging times or persecution, it can feel like a bait and switch. When we don't consider the high cost of following Jesus in advance, then we are setting ourselves up to bail or to fail.

But here's the kicker: whether we accept Jesus' invitation or not, life will be hard. We will face challenges, hurts, and disappointments. Think about the options facing the king about to go to war in verses 31-32. If Jesus tells the parable of the tower to have us count whether we can afford to follow him, he tells the parable of the warring king to ask whether we can really afford not to. Consider what Robert Capon has to say about it:

*Jesus, in other words, gives them the hard sell. "Listen," he says. "I don't want to waste your time here. What I'm laying out for you is not only the best offer of salvation you've ever seen; it's the only one that will actually work when you get it home. This is the real thing, not some \$27.00 fake Rolex Oyster you can pick up on the sidewalk in New York. But unfortunately, even with my spectacularly low overhead, it'll still cost you a bundle. How much? Well, J. P. Morgan said, 'If you have to ask, you can't afford it.' But that was about a yacht, which you could get along without; what I'm selling, you really need. So I say, 'You better ask, because you don't want to be handed the bill on one of your tightwad days and find yourself looking around for a cheaper outfit to deal with.' How much does it cost then? Everything you've got. The works. The whole farm. With no pocket money left over. There are no pockets in a shroud."*

*...Think about what Jesus is actually saying. On the one hand, it is terrifying and unreasonable: in order to gain salvation, life, and reconciliation, you have to lose every amenity, every relationship, every last scrap of the good life you might have. In short, you have to be dead. On the other hand, the deal is a bargain to end all bargains: sooner or later, you're going to have to lose all those things anyway - willy-nilly, the death that is your wherewithal for buying a new world is already in the bank.*

- *From his commentary on Jesus' parables, titled "Kingdom, Grace, Judgment"*

*In other words, a life of following Jesus may come at a high cost, but it is nothing compared to the alternative cost of not following Jesus. Or put another way, following Jesus is a high cost that also comes with great reward. Think about Jesus' parable of the hidden treasure in Matthew 13:44. When the man found the hidden treasure, he knew it would cost "all he had" but he didn't hesitate. In fact, he went out in great joy to sell everything he owned (all his life's pursuits and treasures up to that point) to buy that field with hidden treasure. Because he knew it was worth it. Jesus is saying that what we give up to follow him can't even begin to compare with the splendor of what we will receive. It's costly, but it's worth it.*

- How have you seen this to be true in your life, that following Jesus is costly, but it's worth it? What has been the cost in your life? How has it been worth it?

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**Leaders:** Give your group an opportunity to encourage one another with their experiences. It may take a nudge from you to remind them that we don't share our experiences as a way to show how great we are, but to show how great Jesus is—that following Jesus is completely and totally worth the cost and everything else pales in comparison. Lead the way by preparing and sharing an example from your own life.

## PRAY

Jesus' words to us are challenging and sobering. So let's spend some time in silence and prayer to allow your group to prayerfully count the cost of following Jesus. Consider printing extra copies of this page and asking others in advance to help lead different parts of this prayer time, whether by reading Scripture or praying out loud.

Leader: Let us take a moment to quiet our hearts and minds as we prepare to enter into prayer.

[Silence for Reflection - 1-2 minutes]

[Reflective Reading - Luke 14:27 and 33]

- Reader 1: "...whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."
- Reader 2: "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

Leader: I invite you to spend a few moments considering the cost of following Jesus, and its worth to you.

[Silence for Reflection - 1-2 minutes]

Leader: I'm going to lead us now in a prayer of surrender. If that reflects your ready desire to go all in to follow Jesus, I ask you to pray this along with me silently. If you are still counting the cost, consider using this time to ask God to give you the desire and the courage to go all in.

Leader: Lord Jesus, as we gather in your presence, we acknowledge that you call us to be your disciples. We come before you, ready to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses daily, and to follow you. Grant us the grace to surrender our own will and desires, that we may be fully obedient to your will. Help us to walk in your footsteps, knowing that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Strengthen us, Lord, to embrace the path of discipleship with courage and faith.

[Silence for Reflection - 1-2 minutes]

Leader: Gracious God, we thank You for the opportunity to come together to you in prayer. Help us to support and encourage one another to live out the call to discipleship each day, seeking Your will above all else. Would you make our lives a testimony to others of the surpassing value of "going all in" to follow you, just as you were willing to "go all in" and give your life for us. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.