

The cost of discipleship

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose. How has your pursuit of God been going since we last met? I pray that you have been challenged to seek Him like never before. It's been said, "Christianity without discipleship is *always* Christianity without Christ."

A woman went to a diet center to lose weight. The director took her to a full-length mirror. On it he outlined a figure and told her, "*This* is what I want you to be like at the end of the program." Days of intense dieting and exercise followed, and every week the woman would stand in front of the mirror, discouraged because her bulging outline didn't fit the director's ideal. But she kept at it: she shunned cookies and milkshakes in favor of vegetables and chicken. She got off the sofa, walking until her feet hurt. After what seemed to her a *very* long time, she finally conformed to the longed-for image.



Fellowship

1. What New Year's Resolution have you made in the past? Did you reach your goal?
2. What price did you have to pay along the way?



Discipleship

Giuseppe Garibaldi had an incredibly committed volunteer army in the 1800's. He was an Italian patriot, soldier and hero-figure, and he devoted his life to the cause of uniting Italy. He would appeal for recruits in these terms: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country with his heart and not with his lips only, follow me!"

Jesus invites you to discipleship. But He lets you know *up front* that it is a commitment that will cost you something. It's not going to be easy. To paraphrase Garibaldi, "Let him who loves the Lord with his heart and not with his lips only, be Jesus' disciple!"

Let's go back to the dieting analogy for a moment. Have you ever looked at someone else's body with envy? Have you ever thought, "Boy! I sure wish *I* could look like that! I'll bet *that* person never has to worry about calories or buy clothes to hide a problem area!" Or, if you are a man, thinking "Look at the muscles on that guy! Why can't my arms bulge like that?" Yet the discipline and hard work that an athlete has gone through...the sweat in the gym and denial of desserts..."Well, you can keep those." We want the results, but not the sacrifice.

Jesus' disciples struggled with the same thing. Turn with me to Mark 10:35-45 and we'll read it together.

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.' When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

The disciples wanted to share in Christ's glory, but needed to realize that there is a cost to discipleship. In order to be like the Master, the painful chiseling process of self-sacrifice, denial and servanthood would need to take place. Now let's go to Luke 14, verses 25 through 30.

"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Martin Luther said "A religion that does nothing, that saves nothing, that gives nothing, that costs nothing, that suffers nothing, *is worth nothing.*" That "cost" will come in all shapes and sizes. It may have you continuing in a marriage lacking love and respect, knowing that God hates divorce. It may have you forgiving a friend who has gossiped or taken credit for work you did. Maybe the cost of discipleship and following the Master will have you leaving a movie theatre when His name is taken in vain or confronting someone living in sin as people call you "judgmental." Maybe God will lead you to give

sacrificially when it means giving up a vacation plan or even clothes...or fasting in prayer for the salvation of another.

Adventurer Robert Pelton was confronted with the price of commitment while in Afghanistan. He said, "When I was being shelled on a front line north of Kabul, I asked a 23-year-old Taliban fighter, 'Why don't we dig trenches to escape the bombardment?' "He looked at me and asked, 'If you didn't come here to die, why are you here?'" That's the cost of commitment among believers. It's putting our lives on the line for others so that they turn to us and ask, "Why are you here?" It's following the example of Christ who didn't come to *be* served, but to *serve* and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The little daughter of a Princess was seriously ill with diphtheria. The doctors told the princess not to kiss her little daughter and endanger her own life by breathing the child's breath. Once when the child was struggling to breathe, the mother, forgetting herself entirely, took the little one into her arms to keep her from choking to death. Rasping and struggling for her life, the child said, "Momma, kiss me!" Without thinking of herself the mother tenderly kissed her daughter. She got diphtheria and some days thereafter she went to be forever with the Lord. Real love forgets self. Real love knows no danger. Real love doesn't count the cost.

Author and Pastor Calvin Miller said he thinks the most vibrant missionaries he has met are medical doctors serving in lonely outposts of the Arab world. These physicians and nurses are aware that in winning a Muslim to Christ, they condemn their converts to ostracism and persecution—even martyrdom.

One doctor said to him, "How do you think I feel in longing to lead people to Christ, knowing that the moment my patients receive Christ they face a life-and-death contempt in this culture?"

"It must seem pointless," Miller replied.

"*Pointless?*" the doctor said. "This is the point of the gospel—the cost and consequence of receiving Christ is the entire point of 'Take up your cross and follow me.'"

In the 1500's there was an English Protestant reformer by the name of Hugh Latimer. He was known as a great preacher of his day and had many opportunities to preach. One such opportunity was to preach before King Henry VIII. He thought about his great responsibility to bring a message before the King. He also thought that the message that God laid on his heart was not the message that the King was going to want to hear.

As he contemplated this, he said that he heard a voice, "Latimer, remember you are preaching before King Henry VIII who, if he wills, can take away your life." Then as he began to contemplate this, he heard another voice, "Latimer, remember you are preaching before the King of Kings, do not displease him."

My prayer is that we can echo the words of Oswald Chambers who said, "My Goal is God Himself...at any cost, dear Lord, by any road."



Ministry

3. Read Matthew 8:18-22 and Mark 1:40-45. What costs do we see Jesus paying in these verses in order to be obedient to His Father?

4. Read Matthew 10:28-39. Talk about both the costs and rewards of discipleship.

What costs do you need to be more willing to pay?

5. Talk about the statement: "Salvation is the only free gift that will cost you the rest of your life."

6. Read Philippians 3:7, 8. What did Paul consider to be the ultimate goal of life?

7. Discuss the quote: "The medal, once attained, minimizes every cost and self-sacrifice."

8. Remember, next week is your "Celebration week". Be sure and make some special plans.



Evangelism

9. Last time, we prayed and committed to spending time with someone who is not a disciple of Jesus Christ. Talk about your opportunities and how you can follow up on them this week!



Worship

10. Read Psalm 23...then spend time praising God for His faithful guidance, discipleship, comfort and promised blessings.

11. Pray for each other as we commit ourselves more fully to being disciples of the King of Kings.