



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Letting Go: Sacrifice and the Cost of Discipleship (Luke 14:25-35)

You will need:

Bibles
Pens
Paper

Introduction

- What are the things in your life that you can't do without?
- What are some things in your life that you can do without, but would rather not?
- Is there any confusion between these two categories?
- What was the most difficult thing in your life that you have had to sacrifice? Why was the sacrifice necessary? How did you feel about it?

Reflection

Read out Luke 18:18-23.

Give everyone a piece of paper and pencil or pen.

Ask them to respond to the question *What represents your... wealth?* - based on the following categories: material/economic; relationship; educational; entertainment; socio-political; emotional.

Take some time detailing these things, so you can get a picture of your 'great wealth'. (This wealth is not bad in and of itself, though as we see in the story, it can be a distraction or hindrance to following Jesus.)

- Are there things on that list that you would find it harder to sacrifice than others?
- How would you feel if Jesus asked you to give them up for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

These are not easy things to think about, but true worship of God is giving everything we are and have for his glory.

Ask everyone to put their paper in the middle of the group, and to pray for one another. Pray that the love of God would overwhelm our love of our own wealth, and our love of ourselves. Pray that we would trust in God, believing that if we let go of our own lives he is faithful to satisfy our needs.





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Discussion

Ask this question of the group first: what are the requirements of being a follower of Jesus?

Now read Luke 14:25-35.

Try to summarise what Jesus requires of someone who wants to be a disciple.

- How close did your initial answers come to what Jesus says in Luke 14?
- Is there anything in this passage that makes you uncomfortable? Why?
- What does it mean when Jesus says his followers must 'hate' parents, children, siblings, spouse, and self (v26)? Why is this a requirement?
- What would Jesus' first followers have understood when he told them they must 'carry their cross' (v27)? What does that mean for us today?
- What do the examples of the tower and the war mean (vv 28,31)?
- How does one 'count the cost' of discipleship?
- Have you counted the cost of what it means to take up your cross and follow Jesus? If so, what conclusion did you come to? If not, why not?
- Is this requirement to give up everything for Jesus usually described to people before they become followers of Jesus? Was it described that way to you? Why or why not?
- Why do we need to let go of things in order to follow Jesus?
- What are some immediate practical consequences of this teaching for your life?

Action

Pray together, asking if there is anything God is requiring of you to let go. Then do it.

If it is a material thing, then either give it, or the proceeds of selling it, to the poor. Ask someone in your group to help keep you accountable to this.

Leader's Guide

The requirements Jesus lays out for following him in Luke 14, and in other places in the Gospels, are all or nothing. Jesus demands everything from his followers, and he has that right, because everything was made by him, through him, and for him (Colossians 1:16). He also has this right because he gave everything for his followers, submitting himself even to death on a cross. When Jesus tells his followers that they must pick up their crosses (Luke 14:27), he knows of what he speaks.

Yet this kind of talk can make us uncomfortable. In part, this is because there is hesitancy in the modern world, and in the modern Church, to talk about sacrifice. People don't want to hear what they might need to let go of; they want to hear what they will gain. The cost must not be too high for the potential reward, or people will find another gospel to listen





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But even for those who are willing to talk about sacrifice, Jesus' message in this passage may appear extreme. We don't normally associate Jesus with hatred, yet here he talks about 'hating' one's parents, spouse, children and family (v26). It must be remembered that this is a relative term. It is not meant to stand on its own, but to be understood in the light of the teaching around it. In this case, Jesus' primary point is about being willing to sacrifice everything to follow him. We may look down on the rich ruler for being unwilling to sacrifice his great wealth for the sake of Jesus (Luke 18:18-23), but we should consider what treasures are hindering us from following. This is not saying that family is bad (or that material wealth is bad), but that anything that prevents us from following Jesus must be let go. Jesus isn't being mean or callous, he is being truthful. Following him means that you give everything over to him. There is simply nothing more important than this, not even one's life, as becomes clear in the next lines.

When Jesus tells his disciples that they must 'carry their cross', it is not metaphorical. We tend to spiritualise this teaching, mainly because we do not see too many crosses being used to execute people on the side of the road these days. Jesus' disciples would have seen that sight, however, and it is unlikely they would have forgotten it. The cross could only mean death to them, a horrible, painful, humiliating death. Jesus is saying, 'If you can't follow me to the cross, to death, then you can't follow me.' Though the cross has these days become more of a fashion accessory than an execution device, the message is the same. We are called to live, and to die, for Christ.

This is not the typical evangelistic pitch. The promises of God, rather than the call to the cross, are what tends to be emphasised. Yet we are doing people a disservice by neglecting to mention the cost. As Jesus points out through the tower and war analogies, if there is a cost involved it should be understood and considered before starting the project. Jesus wants to set us free from the things that entangle and enslave us, so that we can follow him without hindrance. The reward is great, but there is still a cost to this discipleship.

Further resources

The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an essential read on the requirements of discipleship, and the dangers of 'cheap grace'.

