

Lesson 2 | March 13, 2022

The Cost of Discipleship

Study Text: Matthew 10:34–39; 16:21–27; Luke 9:57–62

Central Truth: The Christian life requires total devotion to Christ.

Key Verse: Matthew 10:39

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (KJV).

“If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand that Jesus calls all His disciples to grow in devotion to and love for Him.
- Students will evaluate the priorities of their personal lives and identify any misguided priorities that compete with their relationship with the Savior.
- Students will begin to view each day’s goals and achievements through the lens of taking up a personal cross of commitment in obedience to Jesus.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Last week’s study considered the changes Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew underwent as they left former ways of living for new pursuits in obedience to Jesus. Initially, they gave up careers in fishing and tax collecting. Eventually, as Scripture and Church history record, they would suffer and even give their lives. But each sacrifice they made drew them closer to Jesus and His plan for them.

Opening Activity—The Ultimate Cost

Ask: *How would you respond to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s statement, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die”?* (The Cost of Discipleship, trans. Chr. Kaiser Verlag München and R.H. Fuller, rev. Irmgard Booth [New York: SCM Press Ltd., 1959] 89.) Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident who was killed in a concentration camp at the age of 39.

Say: We naturally recoil from an invitation to die, but if we read the Bible closely, we understand that the believer’s willingness to die is not a death wish, but a commitment to Christ so intense and a love for Him so fervent that life itself becomes secondary. We are willing to make sacrifices in order to follow Him supremely. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer says, is to hear the gospel preached as follows: "Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you

are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness." The main defect of such a proclamation is that it contains no demand for discipleship.

The good news of the gospel—the offer of forgiveness for sin and transformation of one's life—comes with an inseparable call to self-sacrifice. On the face of it, this may not sound like good news at all. What a tragedy it is when people bypass the everlasting life Jesus offers—life made possible through His death and resurrection—in order to hold onto something that will only fade away.

Part 1—Be Wholly Devoted to Christ

Noble Ambition

Luke 9:57–58

[Luk 9:57-58 KJV] 57 And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain [man] said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. 58 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air [have] nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay [his] head.

Say: Sometimes we voice lofty spiritual goals but fail to follow through. We tell a friend about our latest Bible reading plan, then days later we abandon it. We promise God that we will forsake a wrong habit, but we stay in the same rut. We are not alone. Peter himself vowed that he would always be faithful to Jesus. Just hours later he denied he even knew Him. Jesus does not discourage our devotion, but He wants us to understand the cost of our commitment. Luke 9 examines that cost. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The unnamed person in Luke's narrative correctly identified the best possible path in life—to follow Jesus without wavering (Luke 9:57). Jesus' answer may offer a clue to the ambitions that brought the would-be disciple to such a declaration. Jesus specifically alluded to the material comforts of life by way of the shelter enjoyed by foxes and birds. His use of such humble illustrations could serve as a contrast to grandiose expectations of the person offering to follow Him (verse 58).

If the road on which this encounter occurred was the road out of Samaria, as suggested by verses 51–56, Jesus had just been rejected by a Samaritan village. Perhaps this person was contrasting his or her own perceived dedication to the Lord with that of people who had turned Him and His disciples away.

Whatever the circumstances, Jesus' answer redirected the attention from the material to the spiritual. By implication, although following Jesus offered no guarantee of physical shelter, it offered immeasurable spiritual benefits borne out by the balance of Luke's narrative about Jesus' life and mission.

The person's response is not recorded. Perhaps Jesus' answer did not bring discouragement, but reshaped the individual behind that anonymous voice. **These verses call each of us to examine our own hearts and discern whether we have Jesus' values in view when we promise our devotion and service to Him.**

Discuss

? How can materialism compromise unhindered service to Christ today?

? What might Jesus' statement represent, in terms of personal sacrifice, in your life?

Divine Invitation

Luke 9:59–62

[Luk 9:59-62 KJV]59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. 60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. 61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. 62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Say: Of the three potential disciples in Luke 9:57–62, two appear to have been sought out by Jesus. This is in harmony with the greater witness of Scripture, in that it is God who draws us to himself through the influence of the Holy Spirit. We might shake our heads in quiet judgment of these two, who each put forward an excuse for delayed obedience. **But they reflect a tendency common to everyone—to try to approach Christ on our own terms.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is important to look at the context of Jesus' statements to the next two unnamed people with whom He came in contact (verses 59–62). **By grouping these examples together, Luke served to establish a truth in that moment, rather than to illustrate a general rule for family relationships. From Genesis' creation narrative onward, God's Word affirms the value of family. The Bible places great importance on grieving the dead together and on bidding family farewell. But Jesus' lordship must always overrule standard life practices, no matter how important. One who would obey the Savior fully must be prepared to do so at the cost of other decisions.**

As with the person who offered to follow Jesus in the previous verses, these two people are unnamed, and their final decision is unrecorded. It is possible that one or both of them responded to Jesus' reply with renewed commitment. A family funeral and a requested farewell might very well have been put aside and a life of service to Jesus filled with joy. But the door is left open to an alternate conclusion. **A family funeral**

might have seemed too important to bypass, even if it meant not walking with Christ as a result. Insisting on bidding loved ones good-bye may have resulted in family pressure to abandon the mission that would have brought about the separation.

The larger point is that some of life's choices that are not sinful in themselves have the potential to become deterrents to making better choices at the leading of the Holy Spirit. How easy it is to pursue a lucrative career over a call to ministry that pays little or to dedicate time and energy to an otherwise-healthy activity at the expense of following Christ. When we delay or reject the voice of God, we compromise our spiritual health and forego future blessings.

Resource Packet Item 1: At a Crossroads

Discuss student responses to the questions on the sheet, which are aimed at promoting personal sacrifice and obedience. Encourage the students to personally respond to the final question during their devotional time this week.

Discuss

? Besides family commitment, what are other potential detours from God's plan for our lives?

? Why is putting Christ first in everything the key to real success in anything?

Part 2—Love Christ Above All Others

Sword of Peace

Matthew 10:34–36

[Mat 10:34-36 KJV] 34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36 And a man's foes [shall be] they of his own household.

Say: It might appear to be an insurmountable contradiction, that the One introduced at His birth by the angelic proclamation of “peace on earth, good will toward men” would state that He was not bringing peace, but rather, a sword (see Luke 2:14). However, the peace the angels proclaimed at Christ's birth would only come with the defeat of evil. The Savior's death and resurrection would usher in centuries of spiritual conflict between His Church and the world order. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The concept of conflict is evident throughout Scripture, from the prophecy in Genesis that the woman's seed would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) until Revelation's description of the final defeat of evil (Revelation 20:7–15). **Enduring**

peace will not be a reality until the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21:1–22:6).

The sword Jesus has brought in the meantime (Matthew 10:34) represents the unshakable standard of righteousness against which the natural human response is rebellion. Any who will follow Christ will inevitably face opposition. And that opposition might come even from one's closest friends and relatives.

In verses 35–36, Jesus was not saying that the desired fruit of the gospel is discord within the home, any more than He was telling would-be disciples that family funerals or heartfelt farewells were detrimental in themselves. **He was driving home the contrast between the lives of the redeemed and the unsaved. There can be no compromise with anyone—even a parent, sibling, or trusted friend—who attempts to deter the believer from putting Christ first. And it is in putting Christ first that the believer experiences ultimate peace in his or her relationship with God.**

There is a second potential contradiction to avoid when living up to this standard. **The “sword” of unwavering faithfulness to Christ and complete rejection of sin cannot cut into the believer's obedience to Jesus' commands regarding love. Love remains the supreme evidence of the believer's redeemed life.** Love must motivate continued efforts to proclaim truth even to those who violently reject it.

Discuss

? How have you dealt with opposition to your faith from people close to you?

? How can you hold on to the peace God gives in the midst of conflict?

Ultimate Love

Matthew 10:37–39

[Mat 10:37-39 KJV] 37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. 39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Say: The greatest love in our lives will motivate all other loves. We see this played out negatively whenever a lesser love takes a front row seat—a love of money or career or public approval can become a cancer that eats away at higher expressions of love. The call of Jesus for His followers to love Him supremely meant that the bond between the Savior and the saved would give life to all other relationships. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus first referenced love for parents as a means of demonstrating His supreme authority in the believer's life (Matthew 10:37). In the Bible, the fifth of the Ten Commandments states: "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12). This went hand-in-hand with following their guidance. Marriages were arranged. Family farms and businesses passed from generation to generation. **For Jesus to call on the believer to love Him more than father or mother was a demand for complete allegiance to His lordship as well.**

Similarly, to love Him more than a son or daughter was to give up some measure of the authority a believer enjoyed as a parent. **Loving Jesus more than a child also meant loving Him more than anything conceived as precious beyond measure. All of one's future seems invested in one's child. Jesus expects full faith in His plan for the future, for life and all of eternity.**

There can be no room for selfish love in the believer's life. Every personal dream and ambition is to be laid at Christ's feet, and the cross of utter commitment to Him is to be shouldered daily (Matthew 10:38–39). The promise attached to this demand, however, is staggering in its implications. By giving up control of our own lives, we gain the immeasurably greater life God has planned for us. Hidden within Jesus' statement is the promise of eternal fellowship with Him.

The "more than" clause in each of Jesus' comparisons is important. When we love anything more than God, it is a destructive love. When we love our Savior supremely, we are transformed into people capable of unselfish love for all, far beyond any love we could express in the absence of our relationship with Christ.

Resource Packet Item 2: Priorities

Encourage the class to list life priorities and consider how students benefit when they keep marriage, parenting, working, and other important emphases under their first love for Jesus and their primary commitment to Him.

Discuss

? Identify ways in which your love for Christ has given greater depth to other loves.

? How would you define the act of taking up your cross to follow Jesus?

Part 3—Deny Yourself and Follow Christ

Opposing Views

Matthew 16:21–23

[Mat 16:21-23 KJV] 21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto

thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Say: Sometimes the truth hurts. Especially when the truth contradicts personal expectations. A misguided belief among Jesus' disciples was that He would establish an earthly kingdom. They envisioned their own places of privilege within that realm. They never turned from such ambitions during Jesus' life, even when He spoke bluntly about the grim reality that awaited Him in Jerusalem. It was only after His resurrection and ascension that they began to truly understand His mission. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

On Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem with His disciples, He outlined what His enemies planned to do to Him (Matthew 16:21). He said they would succeed in killing Him, then followed this announcement with the promise of His resurrection. But this good news appeared to make no impression on those closest to Him. They were so taken aback by His statement that He would die that His promise to return alive after three days missed them entirely.

Peter did not even reference the Resurrection when Matthew noted his rebuttal to Jesus. He took Jesus aside and strongly protested (verse 22). The idea here is that of a rebuke, almost as if Peter were in authority over Jesus. The disciple who had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah only a few verses earlier, and had been commended by Jesus for doing so, was now telling the very One he had called "the Son of the living God" that He was absolutely wrong.

Jesus replied with a strong statement (verse 23). By calling Peter "Satan," Jesus addressed several issues. **The name means "adversary," so Jesus could use the term to identify and correct Peter's opposition. The idea that Jesus' self-sacrifice was somehow a mistake, however, could also point to satanic influence. Peter may have been responding to a tempting spiritual influence in that moment.**

Jesus' conclusion in this rebuke is a life lesson for today. Throughout the Christian life, there is a tension between limited human thinking and the wisdom and direction of the Lord. In the same way that legitimate affection for loved ones cannot be permitted to overshadow love for Christ, even reasonable and carefully-constructed thinking must never be used over the Holy Spirit's leading.

Resource Packet Item 3: Peter's Paradox

Distribute the work sheet and assign half the class to each of the two Scripture passages, perhaps in small groups. After the groups report, ask the students to consider their own lives in light of Peter's example.

Discuss

- ? What do our moments of arguing with God say about our perception of Him?
- ? How can we more consistently shape our thinking with the Holy Spirit's counsel?

World or Soul?

Matthew 16:24–27

[Mat 16:24-27 KJV] 24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Say: We must remember who Jesus' audience is in Matthew 16:24–27. The words here are often used in evangelistic appeals to unbelievers. However, Jesus was not speaking to unbelievers but to the Twelve and to other people who faithfully followed Him. His statements, then, serve as precautions to believers, even if they perceive themselves to be established in the faith. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' statement in verse 24 follows a sequence that is true at the moment of salvation, but has daily application in the life of faith. At salvation, the significant decision is made to give up control of one's life, take up the personal sacrifices represented by Christ's cross, and commit to follow Jesus faithfully as Savior and as Lord. The growing Christian constantly encounters life experiences and expressions of personal will that must be given up or reshaped in obedience. The idea of taking up a cross varies as different challenges to our faith present themselves. And following Jesus with unwavering, ironclad trust is perhaps the most difficult lesson to learn, even for the most mature believers in Christ.

Jesus' next contrast between hanging onto and giving up one's life can ultimately refer to dying for Him, but also connects with life goals and even daily decisions (verse 25). This concept becomes clearer with His question about material gain. Choosing profit over God's providential leading may, in the short term, bring about outward success. But Jesus says that all possible success on earth for a lifetime is not worth losing one's soul for eternity (verse 26).

Theologians throughout Church history have wrestled with the idea of whether or not a follower of Christ who has received salvation can return to an unredeemed life and forfeit that salvation. But here we see that the danger of turning and rejecting Christ is real. Note also that Jesus warns of smaller choices that forfeit a blessing or deeper work of God in a believer's life while he or she is in pursuit of corruptible gain.

Discuss

? Why do you think Jesus expressed strong warnings to His followers rather than to unbelievers?

? What are some “gain the whole world” influences that tempt believers today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: By the time the disciples had spent about three years with Jesus, receiving His teachings, we might expect them to have become so spiritually mature that they scarcely needed further guidance. However, the statements Jesus made to His closest followers only days before His crucifixion show that the path of spiritual growth is long and challenging. We, too, need the Lord’s reminders to dedicate ourselves to Him without reservation. We must seek the Holy Spirit to help us root out anything that would compete with Christ’s rightful place in our hearts. As we love and serve Him without compromise, we will continue to grow as people who deeply love and effectively serve those around us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Give prayerful thought to declarations of purpose you have made to God in the past, and consider whether you are still moving toward fulfilling them.
- As you go about your day, identify how you can more fully connect everything you do to who you are in Christ.
- Examine and ponder your love for the Savior and pray for the power and desire to love Him supremely, and then reflect that love to others.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Total Devotion Brings Favor.
2 Kings 20:1–6

[2Ki 20:1-6 NKJV] 1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.' " 2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, 3 "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done [what was] good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5 "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. 6 "And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver

you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David." ' "

Tuesday:

**A Father's Plea for Devotion.
1 Chronicles 28:1–10**

[1Ch 28:1-10 NKJV] 1 Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel: the officers of the tribes and the captains of the divisions who served the king, the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possessions of the king and of his sons, with the officials, the valiant men, and all the mighty men of valor. 2 Then King David rose to his feet and said, "Hear me, my brethren and my people: I [had] it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made preparations to build it. 3 "But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you [have been] a man of war and have shed blood.' 4 "However the LORD God of Israel chose me above all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever, for He has chosen Judah [to be] the ruler. And of the house of Judah, the house of my father, and among the sons of my father, He was pleased with me to make [me] king over all Israel. 5 "And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons) He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. 6 "Now He said to me, 'It is your son Solomon [who] shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him [to be] My son, and I will be his Father. 7 'Moreover I will establish his kingdom forever, if he is steadfast to observe My commandments and My judgments, as it is this day.' 8 "Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God, be careful to seek out all the commandments of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land, and leave [it] as an inheritance for your children after you forever. 9 "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. 10 "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it."

Wednesday:

**Careless Words Undermine Devotion.
Job 15:1–6**

[Job 15:1-6 NKJV] 1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: 2 "Should a wise man answer with empty knowledge, And fill himself with the east wind? 3 Should he reason with unprofitable talk, Or by speeches with which he can do no good? 4 Yes, you cast off fear, And restrain prayer before God. 5 For your iniquity teaches your mouth, And you choose the tongue of the crafty. 6 Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; Yes, your own lips testify against you.

Thursday:

Devoted to One Another.
Romans 12:9–17

[Rom 12:9-17 NKJV] 9 [Let] love [be] without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 [Be] kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

Friday:

Undivided Devotion.
1 Corinthians 7:28–35

[1Co 7:28-35 NKJV] 28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time [is] short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing [it]. For the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please [his] wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please [her] husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

Saturday:

Led Away From Pure Devotion.
2 Corinthians 11:1–4

[2Co 11:1-4 NKJV] 1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly--and indeed you do bear with me. 2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or [if] you

receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted--you may well put up with it!