

CONVERSATION GUIDE

1. Take 5-10 minutes to discuss last week's sermon.
2. What do you think of when you hear the word "cost"? How did the sermon on Sunday illuminate this term for you, in the context of being a follower of Jesus?

In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus teaches the crowd with him about what a true disciple is *not*. A disciple is *not* one who prioritizes his one plans, relationships—family or otherwise—or possessions above his relationship with Christ. He urges the people in the crowd that they must carry their crosses and follow him. Jesus expands on this by offering two metaphors that the crowds might better understand the decision that IS before them.

READ Luke 14:25-33

DISCUSS and REFLECT

Read Luke 14:25-27

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to crowds of followers on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is aware that he is heading towards his death on the cross, but his followers do not yet understand this. During the time Luke is writing this, Christians are being persecuted for their faith.

Verse 26 can be troubling to read. The use of the term *hate* here is the product of imperfect translation. Biblical scholars agree that Jesus isn't calling his followers to treat their families with animosity, or malign them or wish them ill will, like the English word *hate* implies. Instead, Jesus is asking his followers to prioritize their relationships with Jesus over all other relationships, even those with close family.

In verse 27, he says that anyone who isn't carrying the cross and following him cannot be a disciple. We'll talk more about the crosses we carry in the application section.

- What did the disciples and the people in this crowd hope or expect would happen to Jesus in Jerusalem? Contrast this with what Jesus knew would happen.

- What do these first few verses tell us about Jesus and what he wants for and from his followers?

Read Luke 14:28-33

Jesus uses two pictures to flesh out his point. The first depicts a man planning to build a tower. The most prudent way to go about building this tower is to first sit down and make sure you have enough money to complete the job. If you begin building without doing this, you may run out of money in the middle of the project...and how embarrassing would that be?

The second picture is of a king about to engage in war with another king. Knowing the other king has 20,000 soldiers (as opposed to the first king's 10,000 soldiers), the smartest path for the first king would be to negotiate a peace agreement, instead of going to war.

When we make decisions in our lives, we know the wisest thing to do is to consider the costs of decision and the risks associated with the choice. Jesus is asking these crowds to do the same. He wants them to know up front that they face great risk by following him and that, just like other life decisions they face, they should seriously consider this when they decide whether to follow him. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "Discipleship costs all that we have, all that we love, all that we are. That is less God's doing than our own. If the world were kinder to its reformers, discipleship might be a piece of cake, but it's not, and Jesus doesn't want anyone to be fooled."

In verse 33, Jesus plainly lays out for the crowds that discipleship means risking all of their possessions. Therefore when choosing to follow the path of discipleship, one must be willing to give those possessions up.

- We know that Jesus' followers had false expectations of what Jesus' future looked like. They wanted Jesus to be crowned, not crucified. How does Jesus' message in this passage inform these specific expectations and, more broadly, their ideas about what a life of faith might be like?
- When you came to faith, did you size up the decision like the builder or the king? Or perhaps have you re-assessed your faith

decision at other points along your faith journey? What was that like for you?

APPLY

Without considering the greater context of God's character and promises to us as believers, this passage can feel harsh and daunting. When we think about it, his call in verses 26-27 in its purest form is actually an impossible task. What believer can prioritize God over all aspects of life and relationships in life all the time? We're sinners, in fact – self-focused and easily distracted.

God promises his grace and forgiveness when we get our priorities mixed up. Even more, he promises us his presence. God walks with us as we carry our crosses. He helps us carry our burdens and puts people in our lives to help shoulder the load when we're not up to the task.

Father James Martin says, "Jesus could suffer because he was human, and as a divine person he wanted to enter into our suffering. So maybe that's the final point: in the midst of your crosses, don't forget that you have someone who understands you, who wants to accompany you, and most of all who wants to help you discover new life, even if you can't see it yet."

Let's reflect on the crosses in our lives, about which Martin offers this description: "you don't need to look for your crosses. Life gives them to you...and the real cross is the one that you don't want—because otherwise it's hardly a cross. And the cross is not the result of sin: some suffering is the result of bad or immoral decision we make. But most suffering is not. Even the sinless one suffered."

1. How does God's love for you and the promise of his presence affect how you read this passage?
2. What are the crosses in your life? (think about struggles relating to all facets of your life—family, financial, mental/emotional health) How have you experienced God's faithfulness in carrying the crosses in your life?
3. Have you experienced any "costs of discipleship" in your own life? What was that like for you?

MEMORIZE

Luke 14:27

This week, take some time to zoom out on your life so far. Can you identify times you've acutely felt the cost of discipleship? Were there times where the burden of the cross felt too weighty to bear? Consider how God was present during these times and maybe even used these situations to deepen your faith or prepare you for another season.

For this study, the writer referenced the The NIV Study Bible; Reverend Ruth Chadwick Moore's Sermon, The Cost of Discipleship; Barbara Brown Taylor's book Bread of Angels; and Father James Martin's Facebook post "What does it mean to accept your cross?."