

The Cost of Discipleship¹



SABBATH—MARCH 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 12:49–53; Deuteronomy 21:15; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Matthew 18:8, 9; John 14:1–3; Hebrews 11:32–12:4.

MEMORY VERSE: “Our hope for you remains firm. We know that you suffer just as we do. In the same way, God comforts you just as he comforts us” (2 Corinthians 1:7, NIV).

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, MILLIONS OF UNKNOWN BELIEVERS SACRIFICED (GAVE UP) THEIR LIVES FOR CHRIST. They were imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered. Millions have chosen to lose their jobs, been laughed at, experienced separation from family, and suffered from religious persecution² rather than turn away from Christ. Only God knows the full story of the suffering that His faithful ones have gone through.

Of course, Paul did warn: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be treated badly” (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV). And Peter said, “Christ suffered for you. He left you an example. He expects you to follow in his steps. You too were chosen to suffer” (1 Peter 2:21, NIV).

Some preachers make promises of a successful or wealthy life. But fancy automobiles and more money are not automatic rewards for believers.

In the end, we can be sure that the cost of following Christ is nothing in comparison with the great reward awaiting us in heaven.

1. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

2. persecution—attacks against a group of people because of their beliefs or background.

SUNDAY—MARCH 23**FIGURING OUT THE COST: FIRST ON THE LIST (Luke 12:49–53)**

Study Luke 12:49–53; Luke 14:25, 26; and Matthew 10:37. In what way are we to understand these strong words? What is Jesus telling us here?

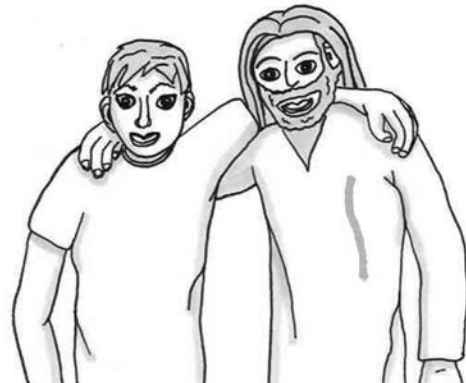
Modern television announcers probably would have developed a story about a scandal from these words found in Luke. It might go something like this: “Today, famous religious leader Jesus of Nazareth encouraged hatred among family members during His afternoon speech. Experts are comparing His statements from today with past statements about encouraging loving relationships with neighbors and enemies. Informed experts wonder if this shows recent policy [plan of doing things] changes. Other opinions suggest selling everything and turning profits over to the Jesus movement. Stand by [wait] for further developments.”

A closer study of the Bible shows that the word *hate* is used to make what Jesus meant clearer. Deuteronomy 21:15 discusses Moses’ law about men with many wives. The King James Version translates it as “one beloved, and another hated” about those wives. Moses’ point is that if the husband favors one wife above others, he cannot reject those less favored. The New Revised Standard Version and Modern Language Bible change the word *beloved* to *loved*

and *hated* to *disliked*. The Tanakh (Jewish Bible) and the New American Standard Bible (Protestant) use *loved* and *unloved*. Clearly, the right meaning is different degrees of love. Therefore, hatred may mean “loving less.” Matthew 10:37 seems to support this suggestion.

Jesus’ point is simple, but it is full of meaning. Whenever family becomes more important than Christ, then Jesus loses Lordship. In other words, serving many masters is not possible. Christ certainly supported strong family connections. But such connections receive strength from an unshakable foundation. That foundation means loving God first and foremost. God does not accept being second place to anything else. Discipleship requires the highest price: 100 percent loyalty to Christ, nothing less!

How do we put Christ before everyone, including family? What does it mean to do just that? What could be some of the results of doing so?



Discipleship requires 100 percent loyalty to Christ.

MONDAY—MARCH 24**CARRYING OUR CROSS
(Luke 14:27)**

Discipleship means that you accept Christ as Savior *and* Lord. Following Jesus means that you are ready to experience the same suffering that Christ did. So, we must be honest in how we give our message. We must teach the glorious (beautiful and holy) truths of righteousness (living holy lives) by faith, Christ's forgiveness, Jesus' soon coming, heaven's wonders, and God's grace.³

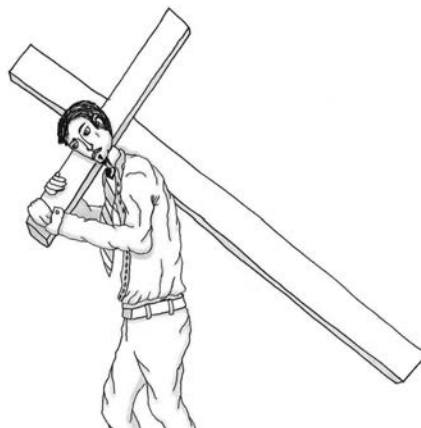
But if believers should desire to preach God's complete message, they cannot overlook cross-carrying. Sadly, some believers are wrong in thinking that it is legalistic⁴ to preach any message that calls human beings into action. "God's grace has done everything. And the human race does nothing except receive it," they boast. But Jesus disagrees.

Read Matthew 16:21–25; Luke 21:12–19; John 15:17–20; and John 16:1, 2. What should we learn from these verses about the cost of following Jesus?

Before baptism, every candidate should understand that Christ Himself has given him or her a cross. Without the cross, he or she cannot become His disciple. Does this spoil the joy of conversion (change of life for the better)? Would promising people

trouble-free lives somehow increase this joy? Conversion does free believers from the burdens of sin. But it does not free them from the responsibilities of discipleship. By taking the name of Christ and by showing that choice through baptism, every believer must know that discipleship comes with a cost. But what does this world offer that makes what Christ offers not worth the cost? Nothing.

When was the last time that you took up your cross? What was the experience like? What did you learn from it that could help someone else struggling with much the same challenge?



Christ has given each of us a cross to carry.

TUESDAY—MARCH 25**DISCIPLINED ANSWER
(Luke 14:31–33)**

Study the following verses: Luke 14:31–33; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Hebrews 12:1–4; and 2 Peter 1:5–11.

3. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

4. legalistic—having to do with a belief that a person can be saved by obeying the law.

What are these verses telling us about the life of a disciple? How have you yourself experienced the reality of what the Bible tells us here?

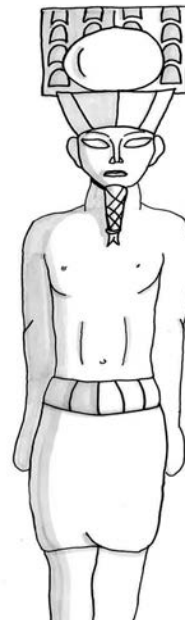
The cost of discipleship⁵ requires discipline. Every imagination, every dream or goal, and every desire must be given to Christ. Everything we own, every talent and ability, and everything of value must be under Christ's command. What we do not surrender (give) to Him can, and will, become an idol. This, too, can lead us astray.

Christ offers us the power to overcome our character⁶ weaknesses. Every appetite, emotion (strong feeling), and desire can be under the leading of His Spirit.

Notice the example that Paul uses in some of the verses for today. No athlete plans to run slower, jump lower, or throw shorter. In the same way, no believer should look backwards. This is especially true when the "race" is something that is eternal.

"The runners drop everything that would weaken their physical powers. By serious and continuous discipline, they train their muscles so that they might push their powers to the greatest limit. How much more important it is for the Christian to do the same, whose goal is to reach heaven! The Christian must bring appetite and passion under control according to the will of God. The Christian must never let his or her attention only be

focused on entertainment, worldly attractions, or comforts. All his or her habits and passions must be brought under the strictest discipline. With the teachings of God's Word [the Bible] and guided by His Spirit, he or she must hold the reins of control at all times."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 311.



What we do not surrender to Christ will be our idol.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 26

STUDYING THE COSTS (Philippians 2:3)

Businesses study proposed projects by studying costs. For example, will these proposals (plans) bring in profits? Are profits worth the expenses? Another measurement is how long

5. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.

6. character—the way someone thinks, feels, or behaves.

the proposal will continue bringing in profits.

The rewards of discipleship may also be measured through comparison with the costs. Those costs may include emotional suffering, social sacrifices, physical torture, financial loss, imprisonment, and death itself. Everyone who undertakes discipleship, then, should first carefully study the investments involved.

What do Matthew 18:8, 9; Luke 6:35; and Philippians 2:3 tell us about some of the costs of discipleship?

What do Luke 18:28–30; John 14:1–3; and Revelation 22:1–5 say about the profits?

There is no question that the cost of following Jesus can be high. Perhaps it is the costliest thing that anyone can do. We should question how real the cost is for our faith and for following Christ. Maybe it will even cost everything.

But one thing is sure: whatever we gain in this life, whatever we do on earth, whatever we make for ourselves, lasts only a short time. One day it will vanish forever.

But what we gain through it is eternal life in a new heaven and new earth. It is, by far, worth much more than anything and everything that this world could ever offer us.

Think about all the pleasures, all the joys and good things of this world here and now. What

are they in comparison to eternity with Christ? How can we learn to remember always this important difference? Why is it important that we do remember?



Through Jesus, we can gain a new heaven and a new earth that will last forever.

THURSDAY—MARCH 27

A BETTER RESURRECTION (RETURN TO LIFE) (Hebrews 11:32–12:4)

Read Hebrews 11:32–12:4. What do these verses say to you about the cost and reward of discipleship?

Such a powerful thought is shown in this passage. This verse especially demonstrates it: “Women received their dead back. The dead were raised to life again. Others were made to suffer greatly. But they refused to be set free. They did that so that after death they would be raised to a better life” (Hebrews 11:35, NIV).

In a way, being both a disciple and a disciple-maker can mean only one thing: “a better resurrection [return to life].” We follow Christ because we

have the promise and the hope of salvation and a new life in a new world. This new life is without sin, suffering, and death. At the same time, we have been given this hope and promise because of the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry (work) of Jesus. For this reason, we are to point others to the same hope and promise. In the end, before the great war between Christ and Satan is over, we will face either the first resurrection or the second resurrection with the wicked. We know for sure which one is the better one. And we must lead others to it, too.

The harvest has ripened. Millions of people are waiting for the call to discipleship. We have been blessed with the gospel and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. This is God's last warning message to the world.

What are we going to do with these truths that we love so much? So, we ask, Where are the harvesters? Where are those willing to come alongside Christ and share the risks? Will you accept God's invitation to be a disciple and a disciple-maker, no matter what the cost is to yourself?

Think about the first resurrection and the second resurrection and what they mean to you. What else is important other than being in the "better" resurrection and helping others to get there, too?

FRIDAY—MARCH 28

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, "In the Regions Beyond," pages 219,

220; "Berea and Athens," pages 241, 242, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

"Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons hidden under the ground are exposed. Destroying flames burst from every opened hole in the ground. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn hot as an oven. Things on earth melt with great heat—the earth also—and the things made by man are burned up (Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10). The earth's surface seems one large, burning lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and death for ungodly men. 'The LORD has chosen the year and the day, when he will take revenge and come to Zion's defense.' Isaiah 34:8 [CEV].

"The wicked receive their reward in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They 'will be like straw. So will all those who do what is evil. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD who rules over all.' Malachi 4:1 [NirV]. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished 'according to their deeds [actions].' "—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*, pages 672, 673.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

① Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose Christian faith led to his death, wrote a famous book called *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). On the next page are some quotes from the book. How do

these fit in with what we have studied this week?

“The old life is left behind, and completely [fully] surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his comfort and safety into a life that is fully unsafe (that is, in truth, into the full safety of the fellowship of Jesus).”—Adapted, pages 62, 63.

“If we would follow Jesus we must

take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his past life.”—Adapted, pages 66, 67.

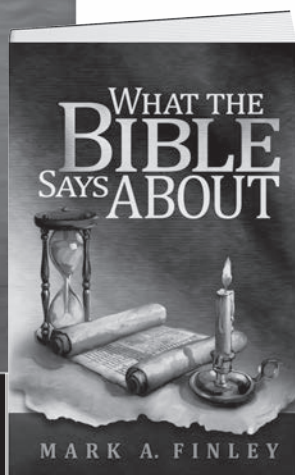
“The cross is placed on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering that every man must experience is the call to drop everything of this world. . . . When Christ calls a man, he calls him to come and die.”—Adapted, page 99.

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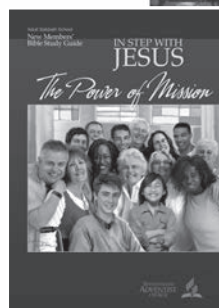
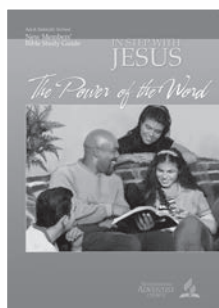
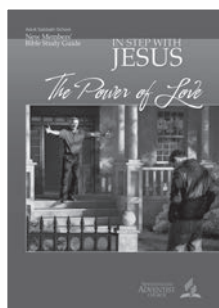
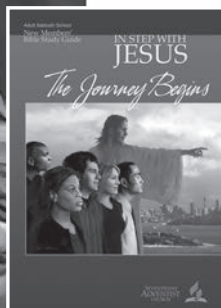
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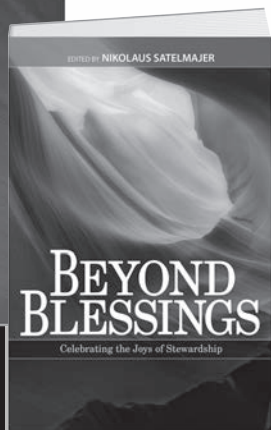
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