

**DO THE MATH**  
**Luke 14:25-33**

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**A man had posted himself in front of an office building with a tray of shoelaces for 25 cents. One executive made it a daily habit to give the unfortunate man a quarter, but he never took the laces. One day the peddler, on receiving the quarter, tapped his departing benefactor on the back: “I don’t like to complain, Sir, but the laces have now gone up to 35 cents. (103: Supply and Demand)**

**Some churches, preachers, and TV programs present the gospel as though they were selling a used car,” writes R. Alan Culpepper of Mercer University. No money down! Attractive terms! Low, low monthly payments! “They make it sound as easy as possible, as though no real commitment were required. Jesus’ call was far different. He was not looking for superficial commitment or a crowd of tagalongs. Instead, he required his followers to be totally committed if they were going to follow at all.” (*The Gospel of Luke*, “The New Interpreter’s Bible, 293). Even today, the call of Christ is for full-price followers, not deep-discount disciples. ([www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com))**

You have to count the costs before you begin to build, set sail on a ship, or make a military maneuver. It is always best to firstly count the costs. Will I have enough money to finish the project? Can my resources, my strength, endure to full completion? If not, it is always best never to begin.

Nothing is more disturbing than to see someone who was not able to complete a task which he began.

To see a house partially erected and then abandoned to the elements to rot.

To hear of a degree almost completed but abandoned just a few hours before graduation. You have seen it, you have heard it. It leaves you feeling empty.

More times than not, we abandon endeavors because the cost was greater than we ever realized. We had not taken the time to properly calculate the resources required and thus halfway, even 90%, into the project we conclude that we can go no further. We swallow our pride and abandon ship. We cut our losses. Losses of money, time and energy. And there stands the abandoned project as a troublesome reminder of an uncompleted past, a flag of failure.

I remember as I was taking courses for my Ph.D. that I was startled by the fact that there were so many students who had put three to five years into their work only to finally “give up” and never complete the degree. They “ran out of gas” just before the end. They could not jump the last hurdle. I remember a conversation with one gentleman who had finished the third chapter of a five-chapter dissertation – that meant he could see the finish line – but he explained that emotionally he could not write another word so he dropped out of the program!

And building projects. The Tower of David is an unfinished, abandoned skyscraper in the capital of Venezuela. It is the third highest skyscraper in the country. The construction of the tower began in 1990, but was halted in 1994 due to the Venezuelan banking crisis. The building remains incomplete and unused. It lacks elevators, installed electricity, running water, balcony railings, windows, and even walls in many places. ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))

Or the Ryugyong Hotel, an unfinished 105-story, 330-meter-tall (1,080 ft.) pyramid-shaped skyscraper in Pyongyang, North Korea. The building is also known as the 105 Building, a reference to its number of floors. The building has been planned as a mixed-use development, which would include a hotel. It is currently listed by Guinness World Records as being the tallest unoccupied building in the world. Construction began in 1987, but was halted in 1992 as North Korea entered a period of economic crisis. ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))

Count the costs — before you begin your endeavor – count the costs.

Young couples rarely count the costs before having children. According to Investopedia, parents who have a child today will spend, on average, \$284,570 by the time the baby turns 18. But as any parent will tell you, the expenses don't start until they turn 18. Throw in a college education, at even a state university, and a wedding, and that brand new baby girl bears a price tag of over half-a-million dollars. Cha-ching. ([www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com))

Jesus himself talks about counting costs. Counting the cost of following Him.

While ordinary human leaders delight in having the masses follow them, Jesus, however, does not delight in the multitudes who have but a superficial interest in Him. He subjects those who desire to follow Him to the most severe sifting process by making tremendous demands.

There were many in the crowd on this particular day who were but curious about Jesus. They wanted to see this new miracle worker. They were curious, so they began to follow Jesus. He might even be the Messiah, so they wanted to follow and to watch, always keeping some distance between themselves and real commitment. Where would you have been that day? Among His true disciples who had left family and friends and job behind, among those who were following Him at all costs – or among the curious crowd?

Would you have been John or James, who left their nets at the seashore and their father Zebedee sitting in the boat that they might follow Jesus?

Would you have been Matthew who left his job with the IRS, a lucrative position of comfort, to travel with his new Rabbi and His students?

Or

Would you have followed at a distance, afraid to come too close to Jesus – keeping a safe margin?

## **I. COUNT THE COST – FOLLOWING CHRIST MEANS PUTTING ALL RELATIONSHIPS SECOND TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST**

V. 26: He who wishes to follow Him must choose Him so unconditionally as Lord and God that he makes all other loyalties and ties absolutely subordinate to his loyalty and devotion to Christ.

Hate equals “semitic pronouncement” love less.

Count the cost. Following Christ means changing your relationship with both friends and family – recognizing that your allegiance comes firstly to Him.

Late in the second game in the 1990 World Series, the Cincinnati Reds ran out of pitchers. Tom Browning was the only remaining relief pitcher. But he had left the stadium earlier in the game and had not returned. The situation was so intense that manager Lou Pinella had Marty Brennaman, the Reds announcer, make an urgent plea for Browning to return to the stadium immediately. Why had he left? Why had he not been in the place where every baseball player dreams of being – the World Series? He had been distracted by a phone call that his wife had gone to the hospital to deliver their child. While his family priorities were in order, sometimes, as people who claim to follow God, we need to be able to distinguish between our loyalty to the Holy and allegiance to the urgent. Our distractions are sometimes important, relevant, and even valuable, but as Christians, loyalty must be an unfractured dedication to the sacred call of Christ. Never fully distracted by the urgent but, rather, secured to the sacred.

Count the costs. Following Jesus may cost you your relationship to your family!

A family that thinks you’ve gone too far, gotten carried away with this “Christ thing.”

A family that is uncomfortable around you now that you seek to live like Christ.

## **II. COUNT THE COSTS – FOLLOWING CHRIST MEANS PUTTING SELFISH AMBITION ASIDE**

V. 27: “Bearing the cross” – the person who wants to follow Christ must be willing to abandon all self-seeking and striving after his own interests. The one who wants to follow Christ must be willing to deny himself in order that he might serve others.

You cannot follow Jesus at a distance. The call from Christ is a call to sacrifice, to the cross. No bench warmers, no hitchhikers, no life time students of ministry. The call to Christ is always a call to get your hands dirty.

Where would you have been that day? Jesus has no bandwagon, He never calls and says, “Jump on board.” Rather, to those who follow Him, to those who claim to be His students, His followers, His disciples – to the “would be” Christian He says, “Stop, count the cost. It is dreadfully expensive to follow Me. Make sure that you are willing to pay the price. It may cost you your friends and family. It will cost you any self-serving ambitions that you may have. To follow Me you will have to put self to death, you will have to pick up and carry your cross.”

Where would you have been that day? Among the curious, gazing upon the miracle worker Jesus, following the multitude but never really coming close enough to be a true disciple.

Would you have been Phillip, who picked up a basket of remaining bread and fish after the 5,000 were fed, or would you have simply been among the curious, reclining on the grass waiting for the disciples to feed you?

Would you have been among the 70 disciples whom Jesus sent two by two to every city to which He was going to visit, to go ahead of Him and share the Good News that the Kingdom of God was at hand, that God was acting in history through the man, His Son, Jesus?

Would you have been one of the 70?

A church member was deeply moved by a sermon the pastor was preaching on a “call to commitment.” The sermon really took to his heart and before the sermon was over he leaped to his feet and cried, “Oh Lord, use me. Oh Lord, use me.” But he added a postscript in caution. “Oh Lord, use me in an advisory capacity.”

Do more than belong – participate.

Do more than care – help.

Do more than receive – give.

Do more than believe – practice.

Do more than be fair – be kind.

Do more than forgive -- forget.

### **III. COUNT THE COST – FOLLOWING JESUS IS NO SIMPLE TASK**

V. 28-33: With these pointed metaphors, Jesus calls for His disciples to “sit down” to count the cost. Jesus calls for serious consideration and deliberate calculation. The decision to follow Christ must not be made only positively, it must also be made thoughtfully.

A builder who begins, but only lays a foundation, is subject to ridicule and shame. The king who miscalculates the strength of his army is a laughing stock. The same is true of the disciple who apparently starts but cannot continue the Christian walk.

Whoever thinks that they want to follow Jesus must stop and count the cost.

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, He is on His way to be crucified. “Watch out,” He seems to be saying. “If you follow a man who is going to the cross, you, yourself, must be ready to suffer as well. Watch who you follow. Are you certain that you want to follow Me? What are you willing to give up, what price are you ready to pay?”

**In Jules Verne’s novel, *The Mysterious Island*, he tells of five men who escape a Civil War prison camp by hijacking a hot-air balloon. As they rise into the air, they realize the wind is carrying them over the ocean. Watching their homeland disappear on the horizon, they wonder how much longer the balloon can stay aloft. As the hours pass and the surface of the ocean draws closer, the men decide they must cast overboard some of the weight, for they had no way to heat the air in the balloon. Shoes, overcoats, and weapons are reluctantly discarded, and the uncomfortable aviators felt their balloon rise. But only temporarily. Soon they find themselves dangerously close to the waves again, so they toss their food. Better to be high and hungry than drown on a full belly! Unfortunately, this, too, is only a temporary solution, and the craft again threatens to lower the men into the sea. One man has an idea: they can tie the ropes that hold the passenger car and sit on those ropes. They then can cut away the basket beneath them. As they sever the very thing they had been standing on, it drops into the ocean, and the balloon rises. Not a minute too soon, they spot land. Eager to stand on terra firma again, the five jump into the water and swim to the island. They live, spared because they were able to discern the difference between what was really needed and what was not. The “necessities” they once thought they couldn’t live without were the very weights that almost cost them their lives. (8846, Encumbrances)**

What is burdening you down? What is weighing upon your life, what is dragging behind you like heavy baggage that you are trying to carry with you as you follow Christ?

Flannery O’Conner has said, “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket when, of course, it is the cross.”

**Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price, to buy which, the merchant will sell all his goods.**

**It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Him. Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the**

life of His Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, PE Jan 89)

Count the cost before you follow Him.

His father had been out of work for nearly four months, and although he didn't know the details of the family finances, nine year old Jerry knew that things were tight. So when his friends talked about a circus coming to town, his first question was, “How much will it cost?” “\$5.00,” one friend said. For days he and his friends wondered and talked about what it would be like. It was the main topic of conversation at recess and at lunch.

One day, one of Jerry's friends said that he had seen a poster near the Wal-Mart. After school they walked the long way home so they could see the poster. It announced “An Old Fashioned Circus Under the Big Top.” The art work gave promise of spectacular entertainment. They had seen every imaginable acrobat and animal act on TV, but to see it live and up close was an exciting possibility. No one could remember anything like this ever happening in their little town.

That night after dinner, Jerry got up enough courage to ask, “Dad, have you heard about the circus that is coming to town?” “Yes,” smiled his father. “Do you think I can go when it comes to town? It's five dollars, and I know that's a lot of money, and I know you've been out of work, and I..” His father interrupted, sensing his son's concern. “I tell you what, for the next few days, I'm going to help Joe Martin paint his house. After school you come over there, give us a hand, and I'm sure we can scrape up the five dollars.”

For the next few afternoons, he went straight from school to the Martin home. He scraped boards, ran errands, and generally helped out. News of the circus was everywhere. There were frequent announcements on the radio, and the Sunday paper had a large section devoted to the circus. Jerry read it over and over.

The final days before the circus seemed to drag on and on, then on Friday evening, Jerry's dad gave him the five dollar bill. Jerry could hardly go to sleep that night, but he was up early Saturday morning. He grabbed a quick breakfast then ran all the way to town. He picked out a great spot on the curb in front of Crawford's Shoe Store. Then he waited. By 10 o'clock the sidewalks began to fill up. People jostled him, but he managed to keep his spot. Everyone was excited. The atmosphere was electric.

Then in the distance he could hear music and the roaring of the people. The sounds grew louder and louder. Jerry shouted when he saw the first clown. He was on a tiny little motorcycle driving around in circles throwing pieces of candy to the people. Quickly followed elephants, camels, cages of lions and tigers, two jugglers, horses ridden by women in beautiful costumes, and a marching band. There was a float with a fat lady and a tall thin man on it. They were followed by a dozen clowns. Their antics were so funny the boy laughed until tears came to his eyes.

**Jerry stood there and took it all in. Sometimes he laughed. Other times he could not speak. He had never seen anything like it. As the last clown passed by, Jerry stepped from the curb and handed the five dollar bill to the clown. Then Jerry happily turned and walked toward home. As he passed by Mr. Martin's house, there was his dad. Jerry ran over to him and began to excitedly report the events. He described in great detail the various things he had seen. As he finished his story, his father smiled curiously, walked over to Jerry, put his arm around him, and said, "Son, you went to see the circus, but you only saw the parade."**

**Every Sunday morning people show up, watch what goes on, and then go home. They think they've seen the church, but they've only seen the parade. In fact, the church is God's people going about life, day-by-day, ministering in Christ's name. (*Illustration Digest*)**

Do the math. Count the costs.  
Following Christ = the cross.