

# The Cost of Discipleship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 12:49–53; Deut. 21:15; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Matt. 18:8, 9; John 14:1–3; Heb. 11:32–12:4.*

**Memory Text:** “Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort” (*2 Corinthians 1:7, ESV*).

Throughout history, nameless millions willingly sacrificed their lives for Christ. They were imprisoned, tortured, even executed. Millions have foregone employment, suffered ridicule, endured expulsion from family, and persevered through religious persecution rather than forsake Christ. Only God knows the full extent of the suffering that His faithful ones have endured.

Of course, Paul forewarned, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (*2 Tim. 3:12, ESV*). And Peter said, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (*1 Pet. 2:21, ESV*).

Despite the promises of the so-called “prosperity” preachers, luxurious automobiles and financial gain are not automatic embellishments afforded to believers.

In the end, we can be sure that whatever the cost of discipleship is, considering the ultimate reward, that cost is cheap enough.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 29.

## Calculating Cost: First Priority

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

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Modern television newscasters would have concocted a prominent scandal from these words: “Today, celebrated religious leader Jesus of Nazareth advocated familial hatred during His afternoon address. Analysts are comparing these current pronouncements with previously released statements that promoted loving relationships with neighbors and enemies. Informed commentators wonder if this indicates recent policy shifts. Other unconfirmed quotations suggest selling everything and turning the proceeds over to the Jesus movement. Stay tuned for further developments.”

A closer study of the Bible and the way in which the word *hate* is used helps to clarify what Jesus meant. Deuteronomy 21:15 contains Mosaic legislation regarding men with multiple wives. The King James Version, following the natural sense, translates thus: “one beloved and another hated,” concerning those wives. Moses’ point is that if the husband favors one wife above others, he cannot deprive those less favored. The New Revised Standard Version and Modern Language Bible change the terminology rendering *beloved* with *loved* and *hated* with *disliked*. The Tanakh (Jewish Bible) and the New American Standard Bible (Protestant) settle on *loved* and *unloved*. Clearly, the intended understanding was relative affection. *Hatred* in this context may indicate “loving less.” Matthew 10:37, the parallel passage, certainly lends credibility to this suggestion.

Jesus’ point is simple yet full of deep implications. Whenever family receives precedence and Christ becomes secondary, Jesus relinquishes lordship. Serving multiple masters is impossible. Christ certainly supported strong family connections. Such connections, however, receive strength from unshakable foundations. That foundation means loving God unreservedly, first and foremost. God disallows every barrier, interruption, or distraction. Discipleship exacts the supreme price: undivided loyalty to Christ.

**How do we, on a daily, practical level, put Christ before everyone, including family? What does it mean to do just that, and what could be some of the consequences?**

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## Bearing Our Cross

**“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple”** (*Luke 14:27*).

Discipleship means accepting Christ as Savior and Lord. Following Jesus means that you are ready to undergo the same suffering that Christ did. Thus, we must be honest in the way in which we present our message. Certainly the glorious truths of righteousness by faith, Christ’s forgiveness, Jesus’ imminent return, heaven’s incomparable wonders, and God’s unmerited grace should be taught.

But should believers desire to proclaim God’s complete message, they cannot overlook cross-bearing. Sadly, some believers erroneously think that preaching any message whereby human beings are called into action is legalistic. “Divine grace has accomplished all,” they proudly exclaim, “and the human race does nothing except receive it.” Jesus, however, disagrees.

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

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Before baptism, every candidate should understand that Christ Himself has assigned him or her a cross, without which they absolutely cannot become His disciple. Does this dampen the joy of conversion? Would unrealistically promising them carefree lives somehow increase this joy? Conversion releases believers from the burdens of sin, not from the responsibilities of discipleship. By taking the name of Christ and by publicly revealing that choice through baptism, every believer must be aware that discipleship comes with a cost. What, though, does this world offer that makes what Christ offers not worth it? 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 a similar challenge?**

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## Disciplined Response

**Analyze** the following passages: *Luke 14:31–33, 1 Cor. 9:24–27, Heb. 12:1–4, 2 Pet. 1:5–11*. What are these texts telling us about the life of a disciple? How have you experienced the reality of what the Bible tells us here?

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The cost of discipleship involves discipline. Every impulse, every imagination, every ambition, and every desire *must* be submitted to Christ. Every possession, physical or invisible, every talent and ability, and everything of value must be under Christ's command. What we don't surrender to Him can, and inevitably will, become an idol, with the potential to lead us astray.

Christ indeed offers us the power to overcome our character defects. Every appetite, emotion, and intellectual inclination can be under the guidance of His Spirit.

Notice the athletic example that Paul used in some of the texts for today. No athlete conspires to run slower, jump lower, or throw shorter. No believer should look backward either, especially when that which is at stake in the "race" is something that's eternal, as opposed to whatever prize an earthly runner might win as a result of all his or her diligent effort and training.

"The runners put aside every indulgence that would tend to weaken the physical powers, and by severe and continuous discipline trained their muscles to strength and endurance, that when the day of the contest should arrive, they might put the heaviest tax upon their powers. How much more important that the Christian, whose eternal interests are at stake, bring appetite and passion under subjection to reason and the will of God! Never must he allow his attention to be diverted by amusements, luxuries, or ease. All his habits and passions must be brought under the strictest discipline. Reason, enlightened by the teachings of God's word and guided by His Spirit, must hold the reins of control."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311.

## Comparing Costs

Corporations explore the viability of proposed projects through cost-benefit analysis. Do specific proposals contain the ingredients necessary for bringing successful returns on investments? Does the benefit outweigh the outlay? Another frequently used measurement is durability. Does the proposal offer sustainable returns?

The rewards of discipleship may likewise be measured through comparison with the costs. Those costs may include emotional suffering, social rejection, physical torture, financial deprivation, imprisonment, and death itself. Everyone who undertakes discipleship should first consider carefully the investments involved.

**What** do the following texts tell us about some of the costs of discipleship? *Matt. 18:8, 9; Luke 6:35; Phil. 2:3.*

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**What** do the following texts say about the benefits? *Luke 18:28–30, John 14:1–3, Rev. 22:1–5.*

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There is no question that the cost of following Jesus can be high, perhaps the costliest thing that anyone can do. Indeed, we should question the reality of our faith and our commitment if following Christ hasn't cost a lot, maybe even everything.

But one thing is sure: whatever we gain in this life, whatever we accomplish, whatever we make for ourselves, it is only temporary. It is something that will not last. It will vanish and vanish forever.

In contrast, what we gain through Jesus—eternal life in a new heaven and new earth—is by far worth more than anything and everything that this world could ever offer us.

**Think through 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 always to keep this contrast before us? Why is it important that we do so?**

## A Better Resurrection

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

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What a powerful concept this passage reveals, especially in the verse that says: “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection” (*Heb. 11:35, NKJV*).

In a sense, being both a disciple and disciple-maker can be boiled down to one thing: “a better resurrection.” We follow Christ because we have the promise, the hope, of redemption, of a new life in a new world, one without sin, suffering, and death. At the same time, because we have been given this hope, this promise—made certain by the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus—we seek to point others to the same hope, the same promise. In the end, before the great controversy is over, we will either face the first or the second resurrection. We know, for sure, which is the better one. What else matters other than not only being in that resurrection ourselves, but doing whatever we can to lead others to it, as well?

The harvest has ripened; millions await the call to discipleship. We have been blessed not only with the gospel but the gospel in the context of the “present truth”—the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, God’s last warning message to the world.

What are we going to do with these truths that we love so much? Thus, we ask, Where are the reapers? Where are those willing to come alongside Christ and share the risks? Will you accept God’s invitation not to only be a disciple but to make disciples, regardless of the cost to yourself?

**Think through the implications of the first resurrection and of the second resurrection. In light of these options, what else matters other than being in the better one and helping others to get there too?**

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**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “In the Regions Beyond,” pp. 219, 220; “Berea and Athens,” pp. 241, 242, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. The weapons concealed in its depths are drawn forth. Devouring flames burst from every yawning chasm. The very rocks are on fire. The day has come that shall burn as an oven. The elements melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein are burned up. Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10. The earth’s surface seems one molten mass—a vast, seething lake of fire. It is the time of the judgment and perdition of ungodly men—‘the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.’ Isaiah 34:8.

“The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They ‘shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts.’ Malachi 4:1. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished ‘according to their deeds.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 672, 673.

### Discussion Question:

❶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose Christian faith led to his death, wrote a famous book called *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Below 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 surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus).”—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 previous existence.”—Pages 66, 67.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”—Page 99.

## The Carpenter's Tools: An Allegory

Some tools lived together in a carpenter's shop. They were having some problems getting along, and some complained that others were not doing their share of work. They met to discuss their issues.

The Hammer spoke first, for he served as the chairman. "Brother Drill," he began, "you and your family are so noisy. And you seem to spin in circles, but go nowhere."

The Drill quickly spoke up. "It's true that I go around in circles, and my work makes noise. But at least I'm sharp. Pencil is small and often so dull that he makes a bad impression. He needs to be sharpened a bit if he expects to be of any use around here."

Pencil felt defensive and spoke up. "Yes," he began, "I am a little blunt at times, but it's because I work hard at my job. At least I'm not rough like Sandpaper here. It seems all he does is rub things the wrong way!"

That remark made Sandpaper really angry. "Hey, what about Ruler here? He measures others by his standards, as though he is the only one right around here."

Ruler surveyed the group and said, "I'll go if I have to, but then so must the Screwdriver. He's so annoying, always tightening here and loosening there."

Screwdriver angrily spat out, "Fine with me! I'll go, but Plane must go, too. His work is superficial; there's no depth to it!" he said.

To this, Plane leveled his terse reply, "Saw's cuts hurt. She divides instead of unifies."

Saw rose up to answer these accusations when suddenly a noise at the door stopped all conversation.

The Carpenter walked in, ready to begin the day's work. He put on His tool belt and stepped to the workbench. He picked up the pencil and ruler. Carefully he measured and marked the wood before him. He sawed along the marks and then planed the cut edges of the wood to smooth the rough edges. He hammered joints into place and drilled holes for screws to make the piece sturdy. Then he sandpapered the wood to a silky smoothness. All day long He worked, using first one tool and then another.

At the end of the day, He gave a hearty blow and blew the dust from the finished product. And then He said, "Beautiful! I couldn't have done it without my tools. Each one had an important role to play. No one tool could have done all the jobs. They're all important."

When we work together, going, praying, and giving, we are the Master's tools to finish His work.



Love rests on freedom, and freedom rests on law. Hence, the core of God's government—the foundation of that government, a government of love—has to be His law. The attack on the law is an attack not just on Christ's character but on the moral order of the creation itself.

The topic for the second quarter 2014 is *Christ and His Law*, written by Keith Burton. We will study the law, especially the question of why so many Christians have fallen into the trap of denying the continued validity of the Ten Commandments and thus, unwittingly, have helped in the attempt to “overthrow” the law. The Bible, though, is clear: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). The link between our loving God and keeping His commandments is stronger than we realize. We love God because we live in a universe where love can exist. And it can exist because the universe is moral, and that morality is based, at least for us as created beings, on God's moral law, the topic of our study for second quarter.

## Lesson 1—Laws in Christ's Day

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Roman Law** (*Luke 2:1–5*)

MONDAY: **Mosaic Law: Civic** (*Heb. 10:28, Deut. 17:2–6*)

TUESDAY: **Mosaic Law: Ceremonial** (*Lev. 1:1–9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Rabbinic Law** (*Luke 14:1–6*)

THURSDAY: **The Moral Law** (*James 2:8–12*)

**Memory Text**—*Romans 2:14, NASB*

**Sabbath Gem:** Various laws functioned in the community during the time of Christ and the early church. These laws will be examined only in the context of helping to set a foundation for the law that will be the focus of the quarter, God's moral law, the Ten Commandments.

## Lesson 2—Christ and the Law of Moses

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Circumcision and Dedication** (*Luke 2:21–24*)

MONDAY: **Jewish Feasts** (*John 5:1*)

TUESDAY: **Jesus in the Temple** (*Luke 2:41–52*)

WEDNESDAY: **Taxes** (*Matt. 17:24–27*)

THURSDAY: **Law Enforcement** (*John 8:1–11*)

**Memory Text**—*John 5:46, NRSV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Throughout His life, Jesus remained faithful to a system that He knew would be fulfilled through His death and resurrection, and ministry in heaven.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.