Have you ever watched an infomercial and wondered how much the item costs? Often you are told how much a 'free trial' costs, but not how much the actual product is. They want you to call without knowing up front what it may cost you.
In this week's reading, Jesus speaks openly about the cost of following Him.

*How have you counted the costs recently before tackling a project at home or at work?*
*How much do people take into account the potential reaction of others when planning something?*
*In what way can a project fail before it starts?* [1]

Read: Luke 14:25-33

As you read this section, look out for some repeated phrases.

## Where are we in Luke

We are still in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27). Note the mention of travelling in verse 25. And the saying about picking up one's cross calls to mind Jesus' own stated purpose for travelling to Jerusalem (9:21-24). This section marks a turning point in the journey, as from now on, Jesus deals mostly with discipleship (apart from 15:1-32, 16:19-31 and 18:9-14 where the main audience are the Pharisees).[2]

## Context

Immediately before this passage is the parable of the Great Banquet, where those that were invited came up with all types of excuses to not attend. As a result, the master instructed his servants to go out into the roads and country lanes and drag people in off the streets.

> The Jewish leadership, though invited and in line for God's blessings, opted out of the invitation. Jesus made an offer, and they refused. They will not be at the table with many others who are poor, needy or racially distinct.[3]

Both groups in this parable, those with the excuses and those dragged in, would benefit from knowing what the cost of discipleship is.
*The parable of the great banquet suggests that God invites everyone to join him. But how does that align with the high cost of discipleship?*

The structure of this subsection of Luke is as follows:
14:25: narrative introduction

[1] Some questions in this study taken from *Adult Questions for LESSONmaker* (Lk 14:25-35), (Logos, 2024).
[2] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* BECNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1996), 1280-1281.
[3] Bock, 1278.

vv. 26–27: requirements of discipleship
vv. 28–32: twin parables of assessment
v. 33: further requirement of discipleship
vv. 34–35: sayings about salt, like Matt 5:13, understood as referring to discipleship, followed by the challenge to hear[4]

## Luke 14:25 - Narrative Introduction

Great crowds were still following Jesus as he travelled, and it is to the crowd that he addresses his words now. Jesus wants those who are considering following him, to know what it entails. This is perhaps in contrast to the excuses offered in 14:15-24.

## Luke 14:26–27 - Requirements of discipleship

Note the repetition, in these two verses and again in verse 33, of the phrase 'cannot be my disciple.'

*Does Jesus really mean we should hate our family and our own life?*

The language of hate used here is Semitic hyperbole.[5] Compare this verse to how Matthew has worded a similar saying in Matthew 10:37.

It is possible that there is an allusion here to 'single-mindedness of the Levites, seen in Deuteronomy 33:9 and Exodus 32:27-29.[6]

**Extra for Experts**

I watched a youtube video recently where a Japanese Christian was talking about how hard it was for a Japanese person to become a Christian, because it entailed turning their back on their ancestors. In their culture, and many others, strong emphasis is placed on filial piety or respect for your elders and ancestors, and this is shown through ancestor veneration. It is a hard thing to turn your back on this cultural expectation.
Watch Video at https://www.youtube.com/shorts/kmke9DIxVtM. And read https://omf.org/my-experience-of-ancestor-veneration/
*What would our Lord say to Japanese Christians who want to honour their ancestors? What would you say?*

For most of us, we won't be disowned by family if we chose Christ, although this might be a possibility if we were leaving another religion to follow Jesus. But in Jesus' day, if a Jewish person chose Christ, it could alienate their family.[7] Nowadays we might face ridicule. And if we have a non-Christian partner, following Christ could be

[4] K. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2008), 384
[5] John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34,* WBC 35B (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1193), 762.
[6] Nolland, 766.
[7] Bock, 1285.

all the harder as we wouldn't be sharing that journey with our partner. But we are still called to love Jesus more than we love our family, and even more than we love our own life. If we do not make Jesus our first priority, we cannot be his disciple.
Note the terms used here: If anyone *comes* to me … And whoever does not carry their cross and *come after* (NIV = *follow*) me cannot be my disciple.
These verbs are present tense, and this suggests that Jesus is talking about the process of discipleship, not the decision to enter into it – whoever is not *bearing* their cross and *coming after* me …[8]

Bearing one's cross means a willingness to bear the pain of persecution, and in Jesus' day, and for many of our brothers and sisters around the world, the very real potential of death at the end of it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says

> The cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of the encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death. Since this happens at the beginning of the Christian life, the cross can never be merely a tragic ending to an otherwise happy religious life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.[9]

This is what Symeon the New Theologian (c. 949-1022) had to say about it.
I heard his holy voice speaking to all without distinction. "He who does not leave father and mother and brothers and all that he possesses and take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." I learned from Scripture and from experience itself that the cross comes at the end for no other reason than that we must endure trials and tribulations and finally voluntary death itself. In times past, when heresies prevailed, many chose death through martyrdom and various tortures. Now, when we through the grace of Christ live in a time of profound and perfect peace, we learn for sure that cross and death consist in nothing else than the complete putting to death of self-will. He who pursues his own will, however slightly, will never be able to observe the law of Christ the Savior.[10]

*What would the phrase, bearing your cross have meant to the disciples before Jesus' death? Shameful death? Violent persecution?*
*What does bearing our cross mean for us in our society?*

Tom Wright says:

Since Christianity has often, quite rightly, been associated with what are called 'family values', it comes as a shock to be told to 'hate' your parents, wife and children, and

[8] Bock, 1285.
[9] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 73. Quoted in Justo L. González, J. L. *Luke* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2010), 183.
[10] Symeon the New Theologian, *Discourses* 20.1. Quoted in A. A. Just, ed. *Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (*Downers Grove, Illinois:* InterVarsity Press., 2005), 241.

siblings; but when the instruction goes one step further, that one must hate one's own self, and be prepared for shameful death ('take up your cross' wasn't simply a figure of speech in Jesus' world!), then we begin to see what's going on. Jesus is not denying the importance of close family, and the propriety of living in supportive harmony with them. But when there is an urgent task to be done, as there now is, then everything else, including one's own **life**, must be put at risk for the sake of the **kingdom**.[11]

## Luke 14:28–32 - twin parables of assessment

Jesus introduces the two parables in verses 28-32 with two rhetorical questions:

v28 - For whom among you, wanting to build a tower …
v31 - Or what King … (NRSV)

The 'for' in verse 28 links back to the challenges of verses 26-27: without these necessary resources, namely "hatred" for family and a cross, there is no successful implementation of discipleship.[12]

Both parables stress the importance of examining a situation and reflecting before acting.

Note the repetition in these verses of the phrase 'to be able' (vv. 29, 30, 31). These verses are about assessing ahead of time whether one can meet the necessary cost.[13]

*What consequences result from not counting the cost before building? (14:29–30)*
*Is it wise to enter into a battle that you cannot win?*

*If the cost of discipleship is so high, how can any one manage to follow Jesus?*

*Is discipleship possible for all people?* This question may seem strange, but A. Hultgren without explanation says, "Discipleship is not for everyone, and certainly not possible for everyone." Possibly he assumes with C. G. Montefiore that Jesus distinguishes between the full disciple and the good person who can enter the kingdom although not a disciple.[14]

This brings to mind something Jonathan Pennington says in his introduction to his book on the Sermon on the Mount; basically, that the church through the years has

[11] T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2004), 180-181.
[12] Nolland, 763.
[13] Note that some have suggested that the second parable is about the disciple considering whether they can afford not to surrender to God. In A. M. Hunter's words, "In the first parable Jesus says, 'Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow me.' In the second he says: 'Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to refuse my demands. Quoted in Snodgrass, 386. However, this does not fit the context as well as both parables pointing to the message that the potential disciple must consider what it will take to be a disciple.
[14] Snodgrass, 386–387.

tried to establish two levels of Christianity – that for the really committed, and a less demanding level for the *hoi polloi.*

> As Christianity developed and became the official religion of a widespread area, a common reading strategy emerged and was practiced in many monastic traditions, especially in the West. This interpretation of the Sermon came from and perpetuated the widespread notion that there are two kinds of Christians – the monks and priests who have a special religious calling and the average lay Christian people who make up the masses of baptized but otherwise minimally Christian churchgoers. In this understanding, the teachings of Jesus are divided into "precepts" and "counsels", with the precepts being necessary for all people for salvation, while obedience to the counsels is necessary if one wants to achieve perfection and the higher calling.[15]

*What is the difference between a common understanding of "Christian" in the Western world today and Jesus' teaching on discipleship in this passage?*[16]

*Do you agree with Pennington that the church has had two levels of Christianity?*

*Do you agree with the idea of two tiers of Christian? Or are we all called to the same high standards?*

*Which costs of following Jesus seem especially high to you?*

*Do you think we put enough emphasis on the cost of following Jesus in our teaching and evangelism?*

*We stress the serious nature of the commitment in marriage.*[17] *Do we do the same with commitment to Christ or are we too quick to count the numbers saved?*

*How do we balance strike the right balance between our evangelistic message and our discipleship?*

*How does this teaching mesh with Matthew 11:28-30?*

## Luke 14:33 - Further requirement of discipleship

In verse 33 we get another cost of discipleship. This is similar to other statements in Luke (Read Luke 12:33-34; 18:18-28; 16:13).

It is possible that Acts 2:44 & 4:32 is how Luke sees this being played out in the life, rather than just disposing of one's assets. Note that the disciples weren't expected

[15] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon of the Mount and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 5.
[16] Some questions in this study are taken from Scott McKnight, *Luke*, New Testament Everyday Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: HarperChristian Resources, 2023), 235.
[17] In the marriage ceremony the following words are said (first form):
Marriage is a way of life to be upheld and honoured. No one should enter into it lightly. It involves a serious and life-long commitment to each other's good in a union of strength, sympathy and delight. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, *A New Zealand Prayer Book, He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (Meadowbank, The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 1989), 780.

to sell all their possessions. Acts 4:32 makes clear that they still had possessions, but they didn't claim them as their own.

However, the key things, as with verses 26-27, 'is the need to be disencumbered (as in v 26) in order to have the necessary freedom to live out the reality of discipleship. In Luke's understanding, preoccupation with property and wealth has a disastrous effect on the possibility of coming to terms with the discipleship demands of Jesus.'[18]

*Does having money and being comfortably well-off keep you from being fully committed to following Jesus? How?*

Tom Wright says:

> Many of Jesus' followers, then and now, have owned houses and lands, and have not felt compelled to abandon them. But being prepared to do so is the sign that one has understood the seriousness of the call to follow Jesus. Any of us, at any time, might be summoned to give up everything quite literally and respond to a new emergency situation.[19]

*Does what Wright say here sound like a cop-out? How can we 'practice at' giving up all that we have before an emergency?*

*For personal reflection:*

*What relationships or other loyalties do you need to pray about to strengthen your loyalty to Jesus?*

**Extra for Experts**

Tom Wright sees a reference to Israel in the two parables:

These two pictures, the tower and the battle, themselves carried a cryptic warning in Jesus' day. The most important building project of his time was of course the **Temple** in Jerusalem: Herod the Great had begun a massive programme of rebuilding and beautifying it, and his sons and heirs were carrying on the work. But what was it all for? Would it ever be completed? Jesus has already warned that God had abandoned his house (13:35); Herod's Temple would shortly be left a smouldering ruin, its folly plain for all to see.[20]

Similarly, the king weighing the cost of a war would be seen as a warning against waging war against Rome. There is some basis for this type of meaning with Jesus' repetition of the phrase 'the things leading to peace' (*ta pros eirēnēn*) from 14:32 as he weeps over Jerusalem and announces its destruction[21]

However, in the immediate context this does not appear to be the primary meaning, which is the cost of discipleship.

[18] Nolland , 766.
[19] Wright, 181.
[20] Wright, 181.
[21] Snodgrass, 386.