

Count the cost...

We hear a lot about the cost of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the beloved book *The Cost of Discipleship*, where he says so memorably, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

This is true. Jesus said, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. . . Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27, 33). To be Jesus’s disciple is costly.

But, according to Dallas Willard, the truth is that “the cost of *nondiscipleship* is far greater.”

The Cost of Discipleship

One day, just as Jesus was leaving town, a young man ran up to him, dropped on his knees, and blurted out, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17–22). It turned out this man was both wealthy and religious. I imagine most observers assumed God blessed the man’s piety with wealth. But something troubled him; something wasn’t right.

So he came to Jesus for the answer. And Jesus loved him for his earnestness, so he gave him the answer in the form of an invitation: “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). This invitation devastated the young man. Suddenly he understood he could not serve God and money (Luke 16:13).

The result: he walked away sorrowful because the cost of discipleship was too high.

The Cost of Nondiscipleship

On another day, while walking through Jericho, Jesus saw a short man sitting in a sycamore tree (Luke 19:1–10). Zacchaeus was also wealthy — but religious? Not so much. I doubt most observers considered Zacchaeus’s wealth to be God’s blessing, since he was a Roman tax collector, and a fraudulent one at that. But something troubled and intrigued this man enough to make him climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus.

When Jesus saw him up there, the Spirit moved him to say, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5). The result of this encounter was that Zacchaeus also suddenly understood he could not serve God and money.

The result: he joyfully gave half of his wealth to the poor and repaid his fraud victims four times what he had stolen — I imagine there was not much left over. For Zacchaeus, the cost of *nondiscipleship* was too high.

Don’t Count the Wrong Cost

Two men both encountered Jesus. One was unwilling to lose his possessions; the other was unwilling to keep them. What made the difference? The thing they each treasured most. They each counted the cost and made their choice.

Jesus tells us to count the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:26–33). But if we count the cost primarily in terms of what we will lose on earth, we're focusing on the wrong cost. Jesus wants us to count the cost of *nondiscipleship*: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

So, let's think about what it cost the rich young man to keep his possessions:

- He lost the forgiveness of all his sins and reconciliation with the Father.
- He lost the joy of having fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).
- He lost the empowering presence and joy of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).
- He lost the profound sign and wonder and joy and strength and comfort of being part of Christ's body, the church, and the everlasting fellowship of the saints (Colossians 1:18; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7).
- He lost the provision of God's sufficient grace for every need (2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:19).
- He lost the privilege of participating in the destruction of the devil's works (1 John 3:8).
- He lost the unspeakable joy of knowing every precious and very great promise of God found their yes for him in Jesus (1 Peter 1:8; 2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 1:20).
- He lost the triumphant joy of seeing others delivered from the domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13).
- He lost the abundant life Jesus would have given him (John 10:10).
- And he lost eternal joy! He walked away from the heavenly treasure of eternal life with God and an inheritance so great that the worst suffering of this age is "light" and "momentary" by comparison (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 4:17).

He lost God! He chose money over God, and so chose inconceivably destitute poverty. This is the tragedy of any idolatry. Don't let it happen to you!

Don't Walk, Climb!

We count the cost of discipleship based on what we treasure most. Our hearts stay with our treasures (Luke 12:34). We will not part with what captures our heart.

What's capturing your heart? If, like the rich young man and Zacchaeus, something's troubling you, go to Jesus. That's the right thing to do.

If Jesus exposes an idol, something you feel you can't give up in order to follow him, don't walk away. You don't have to walk away. Your story can be different than the rich young man's. Don't choose the poverty of any worldly gain over eternal gain, for you will find it no gain at all (Matthew 16:26).

Instead of walking away, climb. Climb whatever sycamore you must in order to get a glimpse of Jesus. Christ is the real gain (Philippians 3:8). Christ is the real treasure (Matthew 13:44). The Spirit causes a treasure-transfer to happen as we look to Jesus. Look until you see him. Ask, seek, knock (Luke 11:9). Climb. And when you see him, like Zacchaeus, you will with joy give away what used to capture your heart rather than lose the treasure of Christ.

Count the cost, the *right* cost. Don't walk away. The cost of nondiscipleship is much too high.