

## **Discipleship: Enter at Your Own Risk**

### **Introduction**

It seems like it should go without saying that if you are planning any sort of large undertaking, like a building project, or a once-in-a-lifetime family vacation, one of the first things that you should do is estimate your cost versus your budget. If the estimated cost is at or below your budget, then fantastic, you can proceed. However, if the cost is above budget, then you should take the time to rework your plans until it fits into your budget. This seems like an obvious truism, and yet there are plenty of examples of incomplete building projects that fizzled out due to lack of funding, or projects that went on for too long and went massively over budget.

According to Popular Mechanic's magazine, the **Big Dig**, is one of the United States' most expensive and notorious building project. The idea was to create a 3.5 mile tunnel to reroute interstate traffic through the city in order to improve traffic flow. The project was conceived of in 1982, construction began in 1991 and was scheduled to finish in 1998 for an estimated budget of 2.8 billion dollars, about 6 billion dollars in 1996 money. After a number of setbacks included discovering buried houses and the remains of sunken ships, leaks in the tunnel, planning flaws and the like, the Big Dig was finally completed in 2007 at a cost of \$22 billion dollars including interest. The project included the excavation of 16 million cubic yards of dirt, and used 3.8 million cubic yards of concrete.

And then we've got West Liberty's own great incomplete architectural marvel, 214 West Columbus Street. The realtor website describes the house like this:

"A great piece of history, originally owned by J.M. Glover and original structure believed to be built in the early 1840's situated on a beautiful corner lot. A large 2 story addition was added to boast over 4400 SF of finished living space all tying into the detail and extraordinary craftsmanship of the Italianate features from that time period."

This house was last purchased in 2008 for a little under \$40,000 and underwent some pretty substantial and beautiful changes to the outside. Unfortunately, as I understand it, the owner ran out of money to finish the house, and so it's been up on the market now for several years and is currently listed at \$245,000. It's a beautiful house to look at on the outside, but on the inside it's bare and unfinished and will probably remain that way for a while to come.

### **Transition:**

If you're going to undertake something big, then you need to count the cost beforehand to make sure that you have the right capital to complete the task. This is the primary point that Jesus' makes about discipleship in Luke 14:25-35; if you want to follow after Jesus, then you need to know the cost and be prepared to pay that price. So this morning we are going consider what counting the cost of discipleship means in our own lives and congregation by answering 2 questions:

- 1) What is the cost of discipleship?

## 2) What does it mean to count the cost?

### **A) Cost of Discipleship**

What is the cost of discipleship? Simply put, the cost of discipleship is everything. In fact, Jesus tells us in Luke 14:33 that “those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” Those are strong words, but Jesus is pretty clear that the bounds of discipleship are pretty black and white: either you give up everything and are counted amongst his followers, or you don’t and you’re not. But what does it mean to give up everything? Jesus gives us two radical illustrations. First, he says we need to hate everyone: <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” Now does Jesus mean for us to actually HATE our family? Elsewhere, he tells us that the second greatest commandment is to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” so surely HATE as we understand it can’t configure into discipleship. Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage in the Message version writing: “Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one’s own self!—can’t be my disciple.” So “hate” in this paraphrase is translated as “let go.” But is that what Jesus really means? Let’s look at another passage that might shed some light onto what Jesus means here. In Luke 9:57-63, Luke records another time when Jesus describes the high cost of discipleship.

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, “Foxes have

dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”<sup>61</sup> Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

In this event, Jesus challenges two normal, acceptable, and expected practices in healthy family relationships: funerals and saying goodbye. He tells both men that if they aren't willing to leave behind their families immediately to follow him, which means leaving behind an unburied father and not giving your family notice for your going, then they aren't truly ready to be his disciples. I believe that Jesus is using exaggeration here to illustrate a point. When you choose to become a disciple, the order of whom and what you hold to be most important gets radically reorganized. If you are going to be a disciple, Jesus must be first in your life. Your love for him should be so great that your love for anyone else looks like hate in comparison. And discipleship means loosening your family ties so that you have the freedom to answer God's calling, even if it means leaving behind those most important to you.

Secondly, Jesus says that the cost of discipleship is to give up your own life. He says in v. 27 “And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Paul further explains this teaching when he writes in Galatians 2:20 “I have

been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Discipleship means dying to yourself, your wants, your desires, your hopes, your dreams, your purposes, and letting Jesus’ wants, desires, hopes, dreams, and purposes live through you. Again, this is a hard teaching, but the great reality is that what Jesus has in store for me is better than anything I could have planned.

**Transition:** So what does it mean to count this high cost of discipleship?

### **B) Counting the Cost**

Jesus gives two simple examples for “counting the cost.” In v. 28 he says <sup>28</sup>“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” And in v. 31 he says: <sup>31</sup>“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?” In both examples, Jesus lists formidable tasks to undertake. If one were going to build a tower or start a war, a considerable amount of planning would need to happen before beginning. Discipleship, according to Jesus, isn’t something you can just wing. True discipleship is going to cost you, so by counting the cost, you are going to know, right up front, if this is a journey that you’re willing to and can afford to take. There are plenty of examples of people who counted the cost and it was simply too high for them. We don’t know if three men who Jesus challenged when they asked to follow him decided to pay the cost or not. Matthew 19 tells of an encounter that Jesus has with a rich young man who wanted to

know what discipleship would cost him. The young man was a very devout follower of the law, but Jesus knew that he was still tied down to his money and possessions, so he challenges the young man to sell everything and give to the poor. The rich young ruler realized that this price was too high for him, so he walked away.

The cost of discipleship isn't something that you necessarily pay up front; in fact, it's more of an installment plan paid out over your lifetime. But it's important, from the very beginning, that you know that there is a very personal cost to discipleship, and that cost is high.

Let's say that you decided you wanted to run a marathon. You would know, from the very beginning, that the race you were going to run is 26.2 miles long and could take anywhere from 4 to 6 hours, give or take an hour or so on either side. Now, just because you decide to run a marathon doesn't mean that you would have to be able to run that distance right at the beginning. In fact, you might only be able to run one mile to start. But, you would need to decide that you are willing to go through the months of training and dieting and hours and hours of pounding the pavement in order to reach your goal.

### **C) Invitation and Challenge**

There are two basic parts of the discipleship journey that Jesus models for the church in the way that he calls and trains his disciples: invitation and challenge. First comes the invitation. In Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus calls the Apostles Peter and Andrew to follow him: <sup>18</sup> And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw

two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>20</sup> They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.” Jesus’ invitation for Peter and Andrew to follow promised high reward, but then it also contained an immediate high cost. If they were going to follow, they had to leave straightaway, which meant leaving behind their plans, their jobs, their possessions, and potentially their family. But Jesus was inviting them into a relationship, and though they had literally just met Jesus, there was some power about him that told them it was worthwhile answering that call.

But, the cost of discipleship is not a one-time payment; it is a recurring cost that we pay out throughout our lives, which leads to the second basic part of the discipleship journey: high challenge. Jesus brought Peter along with him, Jesus taught Peter, Jesus even recognized within Peter a special kind of spirituality and tells Peter that it will be on him that the church will be built. But, Jesus was also not afraid to challenge Peter when he started veering off the path. Shortly after telling Peter that he would give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Peter tries to dissuade Jesus from talking about dying in Jerusalem. Jesus then tells Peter in Matthew 16:23 “You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Whoa, that’s quite a rebuke to give to the man you just handed over the keys of heaven to. And yet Jesus here is making the point to Peter that if you are willing to accept my invitation, and my guidance, then you also

need to be willing to accept my correction when you start steering wrong. Mike Breen writes in his book “Building a Discipleship Culture: “by accepting the invitation, you also accept the challenge that comes with it: The challenge to live into your identity as a son or daughter of the King.”

When we claim Christ as savior and Lord, we become sons and daughters of God, heirs to his kingdom. That’s a high title that we grow into through discipleship, which is why discipleship is so costly. Because something so great as being a child of the king cannot come cheaply.

### **E) The Church Today**

So what does the church today require of a disciple? Well, the answer is not very much. I think that we have high invitation, in that we make the case for believing in Jesus sound pretty good; forgiveness for sins, eternal life. But I also believe we tend to accompany that high invitation with low challenge. We make discipleship an optional part of Christian life, as if you can separate out salvation and discipleship. Why does the church today promote this abbreviated brand of Christianity? I think that we set the bar low because we believe if we set it too high new persons to the church will never be able to clear it. And after all, the primary purpose of the church is to grow in numbers, right?

God does want to see his Church grow, but God desires to see the church grow authentically in discipleship. In Matthew 28, Jesus’ final instructions to his apostles was to go and make



disciples, not church members, not bigger buildings, but authentic followers who have counted the cost and are ready to be challenged. Mike Breen writes: “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”

If we look to the ancient church for guidance, authentic discipleship did not happen in the large gatherings, the communal teachings, or through passionate worship. Authentic discipleship happened through a one on one relationship between a believer and a seeker. In fact, a person was not even allowed to join the church unless he or she had spent at least a year with a believer in a mentoring relationship, and then that believer had to be able to vouch for the maturity and seriousness of the seeker.

So, how do we hold the high invitation and high challenge of the discipleship journey in balance today? I think it starts with our own understanding of what discipleship is. Do we believe that the bar for discipleship is set high and that we have to marry the high invitation to salvation with the high challenge of discipleship, or, as Mike Breen asks, “Have we shifted our criteria for a good disciple as someone who shows up to or stuff, gives money, and occasionally feeds poor people?”

Every year, between 3 and 4 thousand people attempt to through hike the 2100 mile long Appalachian Trail. Of all of those who attempt this massive feat, a little less than 700 actually complete the hike. The trail itself is marked by white

blazes, which are painted white marks that help guide hikers through the terrain. But white blazes aren't the only color markings along the way. People also paint blue blazes to mark trails to interesting viewing points and alternative routes, especially when it comes to particularly difficult hiking. So instead of hiking a series of cut-backs to get up and over a high mountain peak, there might be a blue blaze marking an alternative path around. For the true AT hiker, the blue blaze alternate trail does not count because in its efforts to make the trek a little easier it cuts around the mountains that make the whole experience worthwhile.

I think the church in the modern era has turned to blue blazing discipleship, where we've found supposed short-cuts around the more challenging aspects of discipleship; we've turned discipleship into showing up for church most Sundays of the month, occasionally giving money, and occasionally participating in a service project. But there is a movement to go back to white blaze discipleship, where we are regularly meeting with small groups of people, regularly spending time in Scripture and prayer, keeping one another accountable to the ways in which we share the good news with others, and keeping one another accountable for the ways we struggle with sin. The church is starting to embrace high challenge along with high invitation. The question you have to ask yourself this morning is have you truly counted the cost of your own discipleship journey and are you willing to pay the price in order to become the follower that Jesus has called to Himself? "Whoever has ears, let him or her hear."

