



## The Lost Foundations - Counting the Cost.. First

### Introduction

There once was a man who was introduced to an incredible deal on a car. He was almost certain that it was too good to be true. But the sales pitch was so persuasive; and he just couldn't miss out on such a potentially good deal.

When he got down to the dealership, he found a lot of excited people. Many of them were looking at "his" car. So, when the Senior Salesman called him over, he was quick to respond.

"Better get your name on the dotted line," the friendly and persuasive Salesman encouraged, "before time runs out." It seemed foolish to do otherwise. Our man was ready to sign up.

The dealership had a very efficient sales process. Our man quickly found himself at a desk with pen in hand. The Senior Salesman presented the sales contract – just one piece of paper, with very little to read; and a big line for our man's signature.

"My, this is even easier than I expected", he thought to himself.

It wasn't long before his name was on the line, and he was driving that seemingly inexpensive car home. They had even insisted on washing it before giving him the keys.

Two weeks later, our man got the rest of his contract in the mail. It wasn't what he expected. Apparently, he missed the fine print that committed him to so much.

The more he read, the more frustrated he got. There were added contract fees and required maintenance schedules. There were inspections and taxes that he would have to pay for "as long as he owned the car".

Our man finally came to the conclusion that owning his car would literally cost him his life. Why in the world hadn't someone told him!!! It was hard not to get furious at the Senior Salesman and the company he represented. He thought more than once about suing the whole outfit.

Like our man in this story, I am frustrated. In fact, this may be the most frustrating of The Lost Foundations for me to write. It is frustrating because the truth here is so obvious, and yet we are so obvious in our determination to ignore the truth.

Why aren't we helping interested prospects count the full cost before signing on the proverbial dotted line?

People have been counting the cost and paying it for over 2000 years; and many are doing so, in many other countries, right now. Why do we presume to get a pass? Because we are Americans? Because we have some privileged place with God?

I am not writing this lesson to judge anyone, but it is hard – very hard – not to wonder why so many church leaders choose to ignore their responsibility in helping prospective converts count the cost of following Jesus.

We do not lack for instruction on the subject. *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has been with us since 1959. In it, he said, "Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life."

Before and since Bonhoeffer, many have been encouraged to write and speak on counting the cost. The truth is, the Bible says it clear enough that other writings are not necessary; if we would only believe, live and share what God has to say on the subject.

## Counting the Cost

Let's start with Jesus' encouragement to count the cost.

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. Luke 14:28-32*

Wrapped in a few imperative statements about the cost of being Jesus' disciple (we will get to those later), He encourages us to count the cost first. "First" is not later. In fact, it is the opposite of later.

As we will discover, Jesus' statements regarding the cost of following Him are significant; and they are for everyone that desires to become His disciple. He does not make exceptions; nor does He identify another class of Christian that will be exempt from paying the cost.

Some of you may receive this as negative news. No one mentioned the cost of discipleship to you. "Jesus paid it all" sounds like there is nothing else to pay.

Jesus did make the ultimate sacrifice – to pay a price we could not pay. This is the glorious truth! However, before paying the price for our atonement, He made it perfectly clear that following Him required a sacrifice of our own.

*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Matthew 10:38*

Let me be the first to say I am sorry the cost was hidden from you. It is time we helped you get your mind right about the commitment you made. Hang in there; it is still very good news.

### Why Count the Cost?

Counting the cost comes naturally to most of us. We have been trained to weigh the risks and rewards of investments and other major decisions. Wise business men and women will make sure they have the funds to complete a new facility before beginning the project. They will not move into a new territory without an in-depth understanding of the competition and demographics of the area.

Buying a new home, or upgrading the home you have, requires a counting of the cost for most people. "Can we take that big vacation this year?" is a cost counting; as is, "Do I have time to work out today?" Counting the cost is something we do almost every day of our lives.

Similarly, if we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we would be wise to know what "being His disciple" means; and what is required. In the kingdom of God, there are many sound reasons for counting the cost of following Jesus:

1. It protects us from presumption and a false discipleship.
2. It protects us from the embarrassment of not finishing what we have started.
3. It reveals our dependence on God (and others); that we cannot do this on our own.
4. It reminds and encourages us that Jesus is Lord; reaffirming our commitment to follow Him.
5. It protects us from paying a cost that is not required.

Many have been invited "to accept Jesus as their savior", "to join the church", "to ask Jesus into their hearts", etc. without being instructed to count the cost. I must admit, as a leader sincerely trying to "bring in the

harvest”, I have attempted to make the “decision” as easy as possible. My business background, and our culture, has taught me not to lead with the cost.

But hiding the cost of discipleship does not a good disciple make. Jesus did not invite us to accept Him, join His church, or ask Him into our hearts. He said – very simply and succinctly – “follow Me”. As we will soon discover, that is something entirely different; with an entirely different cost structure.

Many do not discover there is a cost for many years. Most are not investing what’s required. Where does that leave them? Still others, when faced with the cost, assume it is optional, since it was not explained to them when they signed up.

Is it any wonder the church is in the shape it is in? How many are true disciples of Jesus Christ? And, if not disciples, can they be called followers?

Furthermore, as disciple makers, the demonstration of our faith in counting and paying the cost encourages others when they face the tests and requirements of a sacrificial walk. Are we helping anyone when we fail to “teach others to observe all that I have commanded”?

These are difficult questions. Questions that no one likes to ask. But the days are getting short. Time is running out. We must start asking ourselves, and each other, “Have you counted the cost?”

This will be much easier, once our minds have been renewed to think about this adventure from God’s perspective – with the mind of Christ.

### **The Proper Mindset**

Having discovered that the story is about God and His purposes, we should now have an easier time understanding – and committing our way to – His plan for accomplishing all that He desires. It will also help to think of the cost of discipleship as our investment in God’s kingdom (like the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25).

Still, I realize this is not an easy pill to swallow. Jesus did not soft pedal the investment required to be His disciple. The cost of discipleship is significant.

So, in consideration of what lies ahead, let’s pause for a moment and reckon these truths for ourselves:

1. Whatever the cost, whatever investment is required, the return is far greater than anyone can imagine. He has come to give us eternally abundant life – exceedingly above all that we can ask or think.
2. More importantly, we must keep in mind that, though we benefit, we are not doing this for ourselves but for the One who loved us and gave His life for us – the One Who made His only begotten Son to be sin for us; that we might become His righteousness.
3. Therefore, our investment is an opportunity to participate in Jesus’ love for His church; and to love Him, in the process.

With our minds properly set on the wonder of His love, we can now safely and soberly explore the cost of discipleship.

### **The Cost for Every Disciple**

**Disciple (*mathētēs*):** Literally, "a learner" (from *manthano*, "to learn," from a root *math--*, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor), hence it denotes "one who follows one's teaching"; it is used of the "disciples" of Jesus: of Jews who became His adherents, some being secretly so; especially of the twelve Apostles; of all who manifest that they are His "disciples" by abiding in His

Word; in the Acts, of those who believed upon Him and confessed Him. A "disciple" was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher. *Vine's Expository Dictionary*

"Disciple" is not the title for a higher rank of Christian – something that we can opt out of. We are either His disciple or we are not His. Additionally, the teacher/student relationship that has been adopted by modern Western culture is fundamentally different than the teacher/disciple relationship of the Bible.

Generally speaking, a student listens to a teacher to pass a test or complete a task. A disciple follows a teacher, or master, to become like him. A more accurate understanding is "apprentice" – someone who joins with, to become exactly like, a master craftsman.

We should also recognize at this point that disciples are made; and they are made by the master. Only those trained by Jesus Christ will be like Him.

Therefore, as disciple makers, the followers of Jesus are instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13) used by Him to make His disciples. The disciples of Jesus must be disciples to Him, not to any human.

There are more than a dozen passages in which Jesus communicated what was expected of those that desired to be His disciples. Here, I offer some of the more challenging ones – those that should be counted first.

### **Love Him More Than**

*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Matthew 10:37*

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26*

Our love for Jesus must make every other love a distant second – even the love of our own life. To make the point, He used a very strong word to describe (in hyperbole) just how distant the second loves must be. Jesus is jealous for His Bride.

Our investment as His disciples is putting every love in subordination to our love for Him. His return is a love that is worthy of the love He offers. In a beautifully mysterious way, our elevated love for Him makes it possible for us to love one another as He requires.

### **Love One Another**

*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35*

*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. John 15:12-14*

The love Jesus requires is *agapē* – sacrificial love. Jesus expresses His love for us in His Passion of suffering, shame and death. He has commanded each of us to do the same for one another. As we obey His command to love one another, we live out of the "greater love".

Our investment is our life laid down for others. His return is "all will know that you are My disciples". Being like Him, we will reveal Him and remind the world of His love for them.

### **Abide and Bear Much Fruit**

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. John 8:31*

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. John 15:7-8*

Abide means “to continually remain” and “not to depart”. There is no going in and out of abiding. A branch that is abiding in the vine one day and trying to live out of its own life the next will not bear much fruit. In fact, it will die away from the vine.

Our investment is the continual commitment to draw our life from Him and His word. His return is the bearing of much fruit – fruit that will glorify His Father.

### **Denial of Self**

*Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. Luke 9:23*

For each of us, to become a disciple of Christ requires the complete denial of self. By the grace He supplies, we must refuse our inalienable rights as humans. We must follow Him down the difficult way that leads to life (Matthew 7:14)). We must make ourselves “of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:5-7).

Our investment is our independence. His return on that investment is a fellowship that is dependent on Him, and dependable to Him for others.

### **Ultimately, Following Him will Cost You Your Soul**

*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. Mark 8:35*

*He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. John 12:25*

It is important to recognize that these verses are not talking about our old nature, or our old man. The Greek word translated “life” is *psychē*. Our *psychē* is our soul; that part of our being that stays with us throughout eternity.

Therefore, the cost mentioned in these passages is an eternal (i.e., ongoing) surrender of our feelings, desires, and affections to the One who would be our Savior. Nothing less than total subjection is acceptable.

Make no mistake about it; these verses are referring to the continual and progressive process of being saved. The understanding of this is so important that the Holy Spirit had the Gospel writers record these words of Jesus six times (see also, Matthew 10:39; Matthew 16:25; Luke 9:24; Luke 17:33).

Again, this begs the question: Why isn’t this ultimate cost shared with those considering His invitation to “come and follow Me”?

The trials and tribulations of the coming storm will sorely test us in this matter of our life. It is better that we count the cost on the front end. Otherwise, the risks of deception, surprise and disappointment become very great.

### **Striving to Enter**

Losing our life, and hating our life in this world, may be the hardest thing a disciple of Jesus is required to do. It is not something done passively. We must become intentional and passionate – even militant – about entering into the kingdom of God.

*And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'" Luke 13:22-27*

These are some of the most sobering words in all of Scripture. Why isn't this passage taught on a regular basis – particularly to those that are seeking to enter? Entering "through the narrow gate" is clearly a matter of our salvation. Those that do not "strive to enter" will not be able. They will be left outside.

The Greek word translated as "strive" is *agōnizomai*. It means "to enter a contest; to contend with adversaries, fight; metaphorically, to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers; to endeavour with strenuous zeal, strive to obtain something" (from *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*).

Clearly, entering the kingdom of God is hard work. Getting people off the broad way is one thing; but, should we leave them at the gate?

This matter of striving may challenge your salvation paradigm. That's not a bad thing. It may help you to know that the grace that saves us is the same grace that empowers our striving. We will search this out in an upcoming Foundation.

For now, consider this in light of Philippians 2:13 – *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*; and 2Peter 1:3 – *as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*. We know that with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

## The Cost of Being the *Ekklesia*

**Church (*ekklēsia*):** A gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. *Outline of Bible Usage; blueletterbible.org*

In today's Western Christian culture, church means something very different than Jesus intended when He chose *ekklēsia* to describe what He would build. In the secular Greek of His day, the *ekklēsia* were those called out of Rome; sent to the conquered lands, to Romanize the people there – to transform the culture.

Regardless of our postmodern redefinition, Jesus' call to be a "called out" and counter-culture *ekklēsia* has not changed in 2000+ years; and the call remains the same in every community, culture and country. The church is the church, and the world is the world. They are at enmity with each other.

The world will hate us when we stand against it; attempting to change its culture to that of our kingdom. This is, in fact, a good measure of our devotion to the Lord's purpose; a good sign that we are His disciples.

*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*  
John 18:36-37

*Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* James 4:4

*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* John 15:19

*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* 2Timothy 3:12

Rubbing the prevailing society the wrong way is expected of Christ's disciples. So is the world's resistance, aggravation and (dare we say) offense. The question for us: How will we respond?

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*  
Ephesians 6:12

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God...* 2Corinthians 10:3-4

We must resist the temptation to respond from our carnal nature (like the world). Our response must be supernatural.

*But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.* Matthew 5:39-42

I am sure you will agree that it takes more than human will power to turn the other cheek, give up more than is asked, and go farther for someone than required. His commands demand our obedience. Only the supernatural life of Christ can do these things.

It is also important to recognize that the world has found its way into the church; and, as in Jesus' day, may be the source of the most severe cost.

*Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.* Mark 3:6

*But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"* John 19:15

*Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.* Acts 8:1-3

Like Christ, we will feel abandoned and betrayed. Perhaps our own family and friends will turn on us. But we will implore them just the same, because that is what disciples of Jesus Christ do.

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* 2Corinthians 5:20

To be a transforming agent, the Church must consciously and continuously stand apart from the world; and from those in the church who are worldly. This is the risk we take when we invest ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29

Jesus did not hide, nor soft pedal, the investment required to be His disciple. He knew it would be great. Counting the cost is a matter of eternal life. The return is great for those that will invest. However, the only motivation that will sustain us is our love for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, He continually shared the cost, even knowing it would significantly reduce the number of those following Him. He did so because it was His Father's will; and He did it with joy because He knew the return on that investment was far greater than we could imagine.

In same way, we must keep in mind that we are not recruiting converts for ourselves, but for the One who loved us and gave His life for us. Our willingness to make the cost clear is an opportunity to truthfully (i.e., without deception) participate in His love for His Bride; and, as His Bride, to share in that love towards Him. How could we neglect such a salvation? How could we reject such an opportunity?

Becoming a disciple is not an elective graduate course in Jesus' school of ministry. A disciple is something He makes of everyone that desires to follow Him. Counting the cost of discipleship is something best done at the beginning.

How many have raised their hand, walked the aisle, and said a prayer – only to become frustrated and confused when they later found out there was a cost? How many years were wasted in easy believe-ism? What could have been invested for kingdom return – in this life and the one to come?

Does it take more time to count the cost? Absolutely! Might some decide that the cost is too great? It is likely that many will. Are numbers more important than making sure all who are called to follow have counted the cost? Does the threat of lower numbers give us excuse to lead others in disobedience?

It saddens and sobers me to ask these questions. It saddens, because I am one of those who wasted too many years of my life (and God's investment in me). It sobers, because I know this is true for others. As their brother, I have some responsibility for them.

I am not alone in this. Every Christian has been given this responsibility.

There must come a time in every Christian's life when they solemnly count the cost of being a disciple of Christ. As they say, "Better late than never, and better early than late."

There are some of you reading this who are wondering what all this means for those you have loved, who may not have counted the cost. Let me offer you some encouragement. First, they may have counted in their own way. Second, they may have paid the cost even in their failure to formally count it.

Third, we are unable to fathom the depths of God's mercy and grace. I personally believe that the redeemed are not held accountable for the truth they did not know or understand.

We need to avoid the distraction of those things in which we have no control; that we might focus on, "God, what would you have me do now?" So, let me ask you:

Have you counted the cost?

### **Working it Out**

It seems to me that God requires a general cost counting when we first receive Him as Lord and Savior. He then reveals the cost more specifically over time as He iteratively transforms us from glory to glory (2Corinthians 3:18).

As we surrender to God's desires for each season of our life, that desire becomes a purpose of God (that will not be denied Him). God then reveals the beginning portion of His plan for accomplishing His purpose – enough to allow us to count the cost. These are the decisive moments in our journey!

For every Christian, there may not be a more important activity than counting the cost. God has invested authority and influence into us. These investments are for the sake of His kingdom. Our resistance reveals our self-reign and/or our lack of faith.

Counting the cost empowers us to face ourselves and overcome the enemies that seek to distract us from the abundant life Jesus has promised; and from joyful, Spirit-filled ministry. Furthermore, counting the cost qualifies and prepares us to help others do the same.

It is important to recognize that we are responsible to help those we are discipling through this decisive step. It is much easier to teach something that we have experienced ourselves.

Sit down with God, and let Him help you count the cost of being a disciple of His Son.

## Assignment

1. Consider the consequences of our failure to lead others in counting the cost. If necessary, repent and seek His forgiveness. He will give you the strength and courage for the next step (i.e., the actual counting).
2. Edify and encourage those in your spheres of influence to count the cost of following Jesus.
3. Explore the meaning of striving to enter the narrow gate. Take the necessary steps; including, sharing this Lost Foundation with others.

## Recommended Reading

The following are some of my favorite books on this subject. Most can be found at your local Christian book store, or at one of the many online distributors.

**The Cost of Discipleship; Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**The Normal Christian Life; Watchman Nee**