



Counting the Cost – Our Investment

Spiritual Exercise

¹ James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:1-4

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Phil 2:12-13

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 12:32

Prayer

Father God, finding joy in trials and tests is counter-intuitive in our culture. We confess our fear and avoidance of all things difficult and uncomfortable. Give us grace to welcome the trials and tests You bring our way. Give us wisdom and understanding to count the whole of each trial as a joyful exercise. Give us the grace and courage to walk through each trial with patience – that we may be found perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Do this Father for Your Name's sake and for Your Kingdom. In Christ's name, Amen.

Introduction

After we discover and surrender to God's purpose, He begins to show us His plan for accomplishing it. Some He can trust with the whole plan; but for most, He reveals just enough of the plan to allow us to count the cost. This is in accordance with Luke 14:25-33, which we will cover later. For now, suffice it to say that weighing the cost of discipleship is at least a strong recommendation of Jesus Christ (if not a command).

A significant portion of that cost comes in the form of tribulation and trial that produce suffering and require sacrifice. Many Christians are prevented from finding joyful, Spirit-filled ministry by their misunderstanding of the sacrifice and suffering that accompanies the normal Christian life. Poor teaching and self-deception have led many to believe that their walk in Christ should be filled with blessing and happiness. To think that our loving Father would allow tribulation, trial and persecution is difficult for many that claim to be Christians. Even those that have heard the truth hope that it will not come to them.

As we search out this matter of suffering and sacrifice, we will discover that it is not only a requirement for all that would lead a righteous life, but something that the Bible suggests is a blessing that should be pursued. It is another of the kingdom's mysteries – something that is foolishness to the world, but grace and liberation to the children of God. Yes, even the truth about suffering and sacrifice will make us free.

Being made free in this area is critical to our transformation. The cost of discipleship can then be seen as our investment into the kingdom. In a sense, it is the toll we pay on the way toward joyful, Spirit-filled ministry. As disciple makers, our faith encourages others when they face the tests and trials, sufferings and sacrifices.

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Definition

Tribulation (*thlipsis*): primarily means a pressing or pressure, anything which burdens the spirit. It is used of: The calamities of war; want; the distress of woman in child-birth; persecution; the "afflictions" of Christ, from which his followers must not shrink, whether sufferings of body or mind; sufferings in general.

Vine's Expository Dictionary

Disciple (*mathētēs*): lit., "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

Searching Out the Matter

(All Scripture references, but those noted, are NKJV; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; footnotes excluded)

If It Doesn't Kill You... Or, No Pain, No Gain

No one wants to suffer. In fact, we avoid it as much as possible. One of the reasons we strive to stay in control of our lives is to manage things around the suffering. As you will see, this is much to our own harm. Counter intuitive? Yes. Crazy? Maybe. But we are talking about His ways and thoughts – not our own, nor those of this world.

No one wants to talk about suffering. It makes us uncomfortable. When was the last time your pastor or teacher spoke on the benefits of suffering? Why has suffering gotten such a bad reputation in the church? It's strange really, given all the Bible has to say to encourage us in suffering, trial and tribulation.

For many, the following passages will shift their paradigm about the normal Christian life. This is a good thing. They will be made free in the renewing of their minds. Others will reject the truth and remain captive to the deception. As disciple makers, our responsibility is to present the truth and trust God for the rest.

As you read the following passages, let the Holy Spirit speak to you. By the grace of God, you will discover the blessing, promise, requirement, reason and joy of suffering for His Kingdom.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:4, 10

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 10:22

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. John 16:33

²¹ And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."
Acts 14:21-22

¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations,

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knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:1-5

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:16-18

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

⁵ For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. ⁶ Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. ⁷ And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation. 2Corinthians 1:5-7

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church... Colossians 1:24

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

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 1Peter 4:1-2

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 1Peter 4:12-14

Sources of Suffering

There are at least four sources of suffering, and each one is possible in the life of even the most mature and passionate Christian:

1. Many have suffered from the consequences of our own foolishness. For example:
 - a. Being fined for filing an inaccurate tax return;
 - b. Having something stolen from an unlocked car.
2. It is certainly true that a loving Father chastens, rebukes and even scourges His children (Hebrews 12:5-7). This is in response to our sin and/or waywardness.
3. Then there is the tribulation and trial that comes from living in a fallen world. Job is a good example. Other Scripture references include John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3-4; 1Thessalonians 3:4; and 2Thessalonians 1:3-8; 1Peter 4:12-13; and Revelation 3:10.
4. Lastly, there is the "suffering with Christ" (aka, "fellowshipping in His sufferings"). References here include Matthew 5:10; Philippians 1:29-30, 2:5-8, and 3:8-11; Romans 8:16-17; and other in the list above.

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This “suffering with Christ” is a mysterious and awesome truth. Paul, Peter and John considered sharing in His suffering a great privilege. There is a depth of fellowship with the Savior in suffering that few in the American church have experienced. How do we find it? How did He suffer? How should we share in His suffering now?

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Christ laid down his reputation, became a slave and died a humiliating and painful death. As we will discuss, we cannot be His disciple if we do not take up our cross and follow after Him. So what might this “cross” look like for His disciples? Take a look at some of His sufferings in Isaiah 53:

1. He is despised and rejected by men (v.3);
2. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (v. 4);
3. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities (v. 5);
4. He was oppressed and He was afflicted (v. 7).

We must be careful not to assume that these are only for Christ to suffer. As we will discover in the Cost of Discipleship section, we are required to lay down our life for the brethren and to carry their burdens. Let us consider these in light of the preceding passages – as blessings in which we can glory and rejoice.

Conclusion

There are degrees of suffering. We have a tendency to exaggerate our “suffering”. Many times it is only discomfort, or not getting what we want. True suffering must be over something that I need to survive and be healthy. Going without dessert is not suffering. Living without proper nutrition is suffering.

Suffering can be physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Suffering in one area can affect the others. Regardless of the area of greatest suffering, the ways to cope begin with the spiritual. This has the added benefit of finding God’s purpose in creating or allowing the suffering. We have a better chance of not wasting the pain.

There is much for us to unlearn about suffering. For example: Some might say, “It would be foolish to invite, accept or acknowledge suffering in my life.” This contradicts most of the scriptures we’ve reviewed – Romans 5:1-5 and Acts 14:21-22 are two good examples.

Others might say, “It’s one thing to accept suffering, but another to go seeking it out. God does not command us to do that.” I remember agreeing to this (more than once). But now I know that Jesus said,

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

How are we to love one another? As He loved us! And how was that? To make it clear, He later added,

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. John 15:13

Taking up this theme of unconditional love, Paul encourages the Galatians (v. 6:2), “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” I cannot bear the burdens of another if I am not actively seeking to know what they are, and if it is God’s intention for me to bear them. This is a radical shift in the leaning of our hearts toward one another – something the world cannot understand – and something the world will notice.

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

The truth of Scripture regarding the various forms of suffering requires a counter-intuitive and counter-cultural perspective on life and ministry. It requires a great deal of trust and humility. It requires unconditional love.

As with most mysteries, a little bit of understanding begets more questions:

1. If the various forms of suffering are a blessing, promise and condition, then how much time and energy should we invest in delivering others from them?
2. What about our children? Are we delivering them from a blessing when we bail them out of every trial, tribulation and discomfort? What does this teach them about the normal Christian life?
3. How do we disciple others before, during and/or after the suffering?
4. How do we know whether to rescue or walk with someone that is suffering?

Once again, we are faced with issues that are beyond our understanding. Only the Lord has the answers to these and so many questions about suffering for His Kingdom. We find ourselves wholly incapable of living the normal Christian life. Our only answer is to exchange our lives for the One that can – and did – live such a life.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in (or, of) the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20

This will be the subject of a future lesson. For now, let us rest and draw encouragement in the truth that “in Christ all things are possible.” Not only are we sharing in His suffering, but – Hallelujah! – He is sharing in ours.

With this foundation established, we can now move on to search out the matter of the cost of discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship

Suffering is promised by Christ, listed as one of the great blessings, and identified as a condition of our inheritance in Christ. We must, therefore, conclude that a significant part of being a disciple-maker is helping others enter into the various forms of suffering (rather than protect them from it) **and** entering into it with them.

Suffering and discipleship are more closely tied together than one might think:

1. We cannot be a disciple of Christ if we do not take up our cross daily.
2. Suffering must be taught as an important component of the normal Christian life.
3. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ is a significant part of “being like Christ.”
4. One way we can share in the sufferings of Christ is to enter into the suffering of the brethren (“...whatever you do for the least of these, My brethren, you have done it unto Me.”).

“Disciple” is not a higher rank of Christian – something that we can opt out of. We are either His disciple or we are not His... at all. Only those perfectly trained will be like Him. Being a disciple is not like being a student. A student learns to pass a test. Being a disciple is more like being an apprentice – seeking to be exactly like the master craftsman. Disciples are made and they are made by Christ. The Christ is each of us makes disciples through us. They are disciples to Him, not to any human.

If we are to be His disciples, we would be wise to know what that means and what is required – to count the cost. Counting the cost comes natural to most Marketplace Leaders. We have been trained to weigh the risks and rewards of investments and major operational decisions. Wise business men and women will make sure

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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.

There are many good reasons for counting the cost:

1. It reaffirms my commitment to the Lord
2. It reminds and encourages me that He is in charge and in control
3. It protects me from presumption and a false discipleship
4. It is a gracious invitation and a necessary step of entering into the work with Him
5. It protects me from the embarrassment of not finishing what I have started
6. It reveals my dependence on Him
7. It keeps me from paying a cost that is not required of me

As Marketplace Leaders, 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. "Do as I say, not as I do" won't cut it with this one.

So, let's look at a few of the costs of discipleship:

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

Love one another – Not so hard, you say? Remember, this is *agapē* unconditional love... "and greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."

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 15:7-9

Bear much fruit – Not just "fruit", but "much fruit". How much do you think is enough?

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

John 8:31-32

Abide in His word – This means to both live in His word and to draw life from it. Does this describe your attachment to the logos and rhema word of God?

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

Hate your father and mother – Jesus is using comparative hyperbole here (Matthew's account takes a little of the bite out; see v. 11:37), but it is clear that everyone else is to be a distance second in our love affair with Jesus. Is there anyone that is more dear to you?

And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:27

Bear your cross – The last time I checked the cross was an instrument of death and shame! A metaphor perhaps, but is there any way to minimize the severity of it? What is your cross to bear?

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:33

Forsake all – The Greek here means "bid farewell to everything". This is the bottom-line answer to the question, "What will it cost me?" EVERYTHING!!

The natural expectation of such a costly investment would be an equally high return. Amazingly, the return is not just "high", but exceedingly, abundantly more than we can think or imagine. With eternity in mind, the transaction is significantly weighted in the investor's favor.

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Perhaps it is God's grace that we are not presented with all this at once. God patiently waits for His children to also have a better understanding of His love, grace and plans for them. That said, there must come a time in every Christian's life where they solemnly count the cost of being a disciple of Christ. As they say, "Better late than never, better early than late."

It also seems to me that the initial counting is a somewhat general exercise. The young Christian cannot know the full meaning of the costs. It takes many years to understand and embrace God's call. Also, no one knows at any point in their life what they will be given in the future (to forsake).

For these reasons – and out of my own personal experience – I have come to understand that God requires a general cost counting when we first receive Him as Lord and Savior. He then reveals the exact cost over time as He iteratively transforms us from glory to glory during the seasons of our life.

As the Marketplace Leader surrenders to God's desire for this season of His 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 the Marketplace Leader to count the cost. This is the decisive moment in the journey!

Assignment

1. Review your notes and the Scripture passages from this week's module. Share the ones that are most meaningful to someone you are discipling.
2. What are your convictions and fears about suffering and sacrifice? Share these with someone you can trust to pray for you. For any fears you have, remember, "Behind every fear is a lie. Deal with the lie, and the fear will fly."
3. Using the passages provided, count the cost. Decide if you are willing to pay it.
4. As we begin this section on "Sacrificing for His Plan", consider your propensity to own the plan. What motivates this response? Invite the Lord to deal with this and give you grace to surrender it to Him.
5. Consider the following devotion and hymn.

Devotion

Fortitude (from Come Away My Beloved, Francis J. Roberts, pg. 170)

Through a multitude of tests, you will learn courage. It does not matter the price you pay, but at any cost you must obtain strength of character and the fortitude to endure. I would build your resources until you are able to carry unusually heavy loads and withstand intense pressures.

You will become an ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven to whom I can assign critical missions, confident that you are equipped to fulfill them.

It will be in vain if you anticipate resting in a comfortable place. Zion is already filled with those who are at ease. No, you will find yourself put in a place of training and discipline, so that when the moments of crisis come you will not become fainthearted, and you will not be the victim of unwonted fear.

Trust My instruction in all of this, as you have in various past experiences. I am faithful and loving, and I am doing this so that you may meet the future days and not be found wanting.

I Surrender All (written by Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896; Performed by Vineyard Worship)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x2lpLSfq8&feature=related>