

Pastor Kyle Mercer
The Cost of Discipleship

May 11, 2025
Series: Disciple
Matthew 16:13-26

**BIG IDEA – WHEN CHRIST CALLS YOU TO HIMSELF, HE CALLS
YOU OUT OF A BUNCH OF THINGS**

All right, Two Cities Church. Whether you're in here or you're down in Lexington, I want you to know that video is the bull's-eye for our church. We want to make and mobilize disciples, and we want to do that not just *here* but everywhere. We want to do that in your neighborhoods and among the nations, in the carpool line and in the Congo. We want to do that everywhere. Okay?

Here's the thing, guys. We are a sending church. That's why at the end of services... You're like, "How many times at the end of services are people going to get up and we're going to be like, 'They're going to Brazil' or 'They're going to Mumbai'?" It's because we're a sending church. Jacob is an example of saying a gospel goodbye and moving for the sake of missions.

Now, behind me on the screen is going to be a QR code. If you're still interested in short-term missions, I want you to look into our missions and plan a mission trip for 2025 or 2026. We want you to be a part of a short-term mission trip. I also want you to know we're not just sending short-term mission trips; we are sending people down to Lexington to launch a campus, we're sending people to Davie County to plant a church, and we're sending missionaries all over the world.

So, I wanted to tell you that at the beginning, but now I want you to open up your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 16. We are in a *Disciple* series. I'm going to meet you there in just a few minutes. We're in a *Disciple* series, but I know it's Mother's Day, so happy Mother's Day. Here's why I thought this is the perfect series for Mother's Day. Who is the number-one person who has made the most disciples over the last 2,000 years? Moms.

You want to talk about life on life? You want to talk about discipleship, an 18-year investment in the next generation, passing on a vision and a view of God and the values of Scripture? So, if you are a mom in this room, or maybe you're pregnant and you're about to become a mom, would you stand? We want to honor you for a second. Stand up. Look at all of these moms. So many moms. Great. We love you guys. Thank you. Happy Mother's Day.

And we don't just love moms; we love the ladies, which is why we're having a women's event. (I had to fit that in here somehow.) June 7. We love the women maybe more than the men, because the men got a night and the women get a conference.

The main speaker is Phylcia Masonheimer, and I'm really excited about this. Talk about discipleship. The women in our church are going to be doing breakout sessions right after the plenary session, so you don't want to miss that. That's going to be June 7. There will be coffee here as well, which is great.

Also, I want to let you know the men's event was an incredible success. Let's show a couple of pictures of that. We had just over 1,200 men show up. Yeah, that's awesome. It's not a competition or anything, but I thought, "Where else in the Triad, this whole year, will 1,200 men gather together to worship Jesus and be challenged?"

I'm just telling you, you have to ask your husband, you have to ask your boyfriend, you have to ask one of the guys in our church what happened, because it was a very meaningful and moving time. Robby Gallaty brought a unique word. In fact, I hope sometime in 2026, if I can, to get him back to preach to our whole church. With that said, let's pray, and we'll get to work.

Lord, I am thankful for moms today. I'm thankful for my mom. I'm thankful for Margy, who's the mom of our kids. It has been said that no one grew up poor who had a godly mom, so we are so thankful for the investment that moms make. We pray for moms because they often feel completely overwhelmed, especially in the little years.

We pray, as we often think on Mother's Day, for all of the ladies in here who desire to be a mom. It's a good desire. We pray you would give them the desires of their heart. So many of the stories of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament are you opening the womb so that a woman can become a mom, Lord. We pray you would do that miracle even right now. In Jesus' name we ask it, amen.

Like I told you, we are in a *Disciple* series. I'm going to meet you in Matthew 16:13 in a few minutes, but I just have to introduce a few things. Now, I've been talking about this for three weeks, and you might be getting tired of it, but I'm going to give you the definition of a *disciple* just one more time. We did that in the first week, and I told you before we can't be a disciple if we don't even know how to define it.

So here's what it is. It's somebody who is following Jesus and helping others find and follow Jesus. What I love about that and what I told you last week and the week before is that means you're always asking, "What is my first step, and what is my next step, in following Jesus?" If you're mature, then you're asking, "What are other people's first step and next step?" and you move from steps of obedience to steps of sacrifice.

So, that was the first week, and then last week we talked about the community of the disciples, and we looked at all of these relationships Jesus had, but particularly his relationship with his disciples. We basically said Christianity isn't a spectator sport. Christianity isn't a solo sport, and you need to tie yourself into relationships, because discipleship happens in relationships.

Don't think that the way you're going to grow the most spiritually is by finding a Bible and getting alone for a long time in the woods by yourself. That's how every cult starts, just so you know. Get alone with Jesus and read your Bible, but it's going to be as you tether and tie yourself to meaningful relationships in which you open up your Bible and open up your life.

Here's what you should do. You should get in meaningful relationships with Christians, and then you should "one another" one another. I mean, all the "one anothers" of Scripture... Do that with one another. Pray for one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, and serve one another.

Now, here's what I have to talk about today. Not *The Call to Discipleship*. That was kind of easy and fun to talk about. And not *The Community of Discipleship*. That was kind of interesting for me to talk about. Today I have to talk about *The Cost of Discipleship*, which is not something I'm really looking forward to talking about.

I was sitting on the front row thinking about you guys and praying, and I was thinking, "How do I talk to a bunch of modern people in Winston-Salem in 2025 about the cost of following Christ?" Aren't we such a comfortable, domesticated people? I'm here, and I'm thinking to myself before I get up here... I'm like, "How am I ready to talk on the cost of discipleship?" I sleep with three pillows, and two of them have to be Tempur-Pedic. So pray for me as I talk to you about this.

But I need to talk about the cost of discipleship, because here's the thing. I'm going to get serious for a second. Christianity is costly, and following Christ... You'll see this today. He's very honest and straightforward that it's going to cost you something to follow Christ, which is why we always say here that Christianity is a terrible hobby.

We would recommend for a hobby golf, pickleball, hunting, fishing, running, biking, or working out. Those are great hobbies. Christianity is a horrible hobby because it's

going to cost you so much. Now, when I talk about the cost of discipleship, there are two things I want you to understand, and then we're going to get to the text. This will frame what we're going to do today.

When you think of cost, you also have to think of value. Obviously, I'm not an economist, and I'm not going to talk a lot on economics, but here's the whole idea: *cost* is what you pay; *value* is what you get. That's kind of an oversimplification. So, you feel good if you spent a certain amount (cost) and you feel like "What I got was even more valuable." You feel horrible if you're like, "I spent so much. It cost so much, and when I got it, it was of so little value."

What Jesus is going to say today... He's going to tell you both. The cost of following him is enormous, but you will always get more than you give. You can't outgive God, and Jesus will not be your debtor. So, here's the outline for today in Matthew 16. Jesus is going to tell you what discipleship cost *him* and then what discipleship costs *you*.

Basically, the first part is what it costs to *make* you a disciple (that's the life of Jesus Christ himself), and then what it costs for you to *be* a disciple. So, we're going to cover a lot, but it's going to make sense, I think. We'll start in verse 13. We're going to talk about the cost of discipleship and the church. Here it is.

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi..." I had a chance to be there. It's 25 miles north of Jerusalem. So much of what Jesus does is take short-term mission trips and spiritual retreats with his disciples. So, it's about a day's journey.

He takes them up to Caesarea Philippi, which is the worst area, in the sense of morality, in that area. It would be like us going, "Hey, guys, we're going to go on a trip. Let's all go to Asheville." That's what it would be like. The Asheville of the day. ***"...he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"*** That's Jesus' favorite designation for himself.

"And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

This is the first mention of the church in the Bible, so I want to take a few minutes and talk to you about what the church is. Jesus says, "I will build my church," and we're going to see in a few minutes Jesus is willing to die for his church. That's how

he's going to build his church. So then you might ask (and I don't know where we all are in this room), "Well, then, what is the church?"

I think the average American would think of the church as a building, but Jesus isn't saying, "I'm going to build my building." Other people might think of the church as an event, and depending on what denomination and how long the pastor preaches, sometimes it's an hour, sometimes it's an hour and a half, and we get a sermon, we get some songs, and we get some free childcare. But Jesus is not saying, "I'm going to die for an event."

Some people think of the church as maybe a social club. This would be less common today, but it's a great place to meet people who have similar values. Or some people think it's a nonprofit that does good deeds. Jesus is not saying, "I will build my nonprofit." I don't do this a lot, but I want to tell you what the Greek word for *church* is, because it's helpful, and how it's connected to cost.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. If you could only know 10 Greek words, that would be a good one. *Ekklesia* is the word *church*. *Ekk* means to call out and *lesia* means to gather. So, literally, what is the church? A called-out people who gather on purpose. There's more I could say, but there's not less I could say on that. It's a called-out people who gather on purpose.

So, here's what I want you to see about the cost of discipleship connected to the church: *when Christ calls you to himself, he calls you out of a bunch of things*. And it's hard. I remember I was a brand-new Christian. I was working at Pizza Hut. I have this memory of... I was cleaning the tables at Pizza Hut, and I was thinking...

Again, I was brand-new in the Lord, and I'm thinking to myself, "It's been hard to live without certain sins in my life." I was 18 years old, but there were just sins... I was young. I didn't even get a chance to live in sin for very long. It's weird. I can picture this. I'm thinking to myself, "Man! It's really hard to live without certain sins in my life."

Jesus calls you out of sin. He calls you out of the world, and by that I don't mean, necessarily, the people of the world, although sometimes you have to leave certain relationships. He calls you out of the value system of the world. He calls you out of worshipping all of your idols, the idols you're worshipping that don't love you back. Your house doesn't love you back. Your job doesn't love you back...all of the things that are trying to save you.

He calls you out of darkness and ignorance. But here's the interesting thing: he calls you to gather. We're called to Christ, but we're called to gather with the people. By the way, the idea of gathering is ancient. If you look at the Old Testament, when was

the first time the church gathers? It's really Moses and Sinai around the Ten Commandments.

What we're doing here, guys... I know we have IMAG screens, lights, cameras, sound, and comfortable chairs, but what we're doing right now is ancient. It's a modern form of an ancient practice. We're gathering around God's Word. This is, by the way, why I don't think online church is going to work, even though people are excited about it (some people are). It's because God created us to gather.

This is why COVID was so horrible. I remember, the first time we came back from COVID, people just showed up at our church crying. It was like, "Are these sad tears or happy tears?" It was like, "What's going on?" All of it was happy tears because they hadn't gathered, and it had only been three months.

This is why we get excited about NASCAR (some of you). I mean, the people who gather at the Bowman Gray Stadium this time of year. People love to gather...gather for sporting events, gather for birthday parties. We love to gather. Now, here's the thing. We don't think about it this way, but I *want* you to think about it this way. It is costly to gather as a church.

There are two ways it's costly. The first way we haven't really experienced yet, not in 2025, not in Winston-Salem, I don't think, which is there's a social cost to gathering. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that because I don't think there's a big social cost right now.

Now, you have to understand, in a lot of places in the world there's a huge social cost to gather. It could cost me being exiled from my family. It could cost me my reputation. I could get persecuted by the government if they know I gathered. So, I don't want to talk about the social cost of gathering. It's real, and if it was applicable to us right now, I would talk about it for a long time.

I want to talk about the other cost of gathering, which is the cost of time and the cost of just making it a priority. Some of you are wanting a costless Christianity. The first thing it's going to cost you to follow Christ is you're going to have to make it a priority to gather with God's people. You're going to have to decide, "If we're in town, we're going to be in church, and church is going to be the priority in our lives."

It doesn't have to be *this* church, but if you're going to get meaningfully connected to any church... Maybe they have Sunday school. Maybe, like us, they have Community Groups. Maybe, like us, they have some kind of discipleship group. Maybe they have an "age and stage" ministry.

I just want to encourage you. On Mother's Day, I want to encourage moms and dads. You're going to have to make it a priority for you and your kids to gather, which means you're going to have to say "no" to certain things. Robby Gallaty when he was here... This doesn't sound as powerful from me, because I'm not 6'6" and don't have that beautiful beard he has.

He was walking around the stage, and he was like... He was talking to the men, so, ladies, here's one of the things he told us. He said, "Men, when it came to church activities and church involvement with my family, I was a benevolent dictator. We do not have the 'committee on committees' in our house. We do not decide by vote and consensus whether or not we're going to be deeply involved in the life of our church."

Then he basically said... This is what *he* said. So, I'll say something hard but quote somebody else. He basically said, "If you don't bring your kids to church in their teenage years, don't be surprised when they don't go to church in their adult years." Here's the whole thing, guys, because I'm growing up and learning about all this stuff. I now have a 13-year-old, an 11-year-old, and a 9-year-old, and there's, like, 4 percent of me that hopes one of them becomes a professional athlete. I have all that in me, just like you do.

My son William is... I'm very proud of this. He got to be the captain of the traveling soccer team. I would rather watch him play than Wake Forest basketball or something. I love it. It's a pretty big deal...multiple practices. They travel *here*. They go *here*. They go *here*. There are practices on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

We just sat down with him and said, "Man, you're not going to be able to go to practice on Wednesday nights," and we had to have the conversation with the coach. To my son's credit, he never complained about it one time, and then we actually were able to find him a ride, so now he doesn't have to miss Wednesday practice. So the story loses a little bit of its power as I tell you guys it, but there was a season... Now he goes to all of the practices, but we had to deal with it.

It's just real. It's like the old joke, "Spend \$50,000 so your kid can play bad Division 3 soccer." Don't do that. What we're just saying is tie and tether your life to this church or *a* church. But we don't get it. There's a cost to gather. We can't just do it when it's convenient.

So, he says, "I will build my church." Go back to verse 13. ***"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"*** If we're going to understand the cost of discipleship, we need to understand, first, what the church is; secondly, who Christ is.

I think this is interesting. Jesus engages his disciples in spiritual conversations, and he engages his disciples in spiritual conversations by asking good questions. Some of you just need to get better at asking good questions. That's it. He asks the question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

Now, you could ask, "Why would Jesus ask other people who they think he is?" Is Jesus confused about who he is; therefore, he has to ask other people? "Hey, I'm having an identity crisis." Is he like a middle schooler who's insecure and wants to know what everybody else thinks about him? Obviously not.

Jesus is asking, "Who do people think I am?" because he wants people to know who he is. What's interesting about Jesus is he's the most self-directed, self-centered, self-focused of all of the world religion teachers. Buddha, Confucius, and Muhammad all pointed away from themselves; Jesus points back to himself.

So, he asks, "Who do people say that I am?" Verse 14: ***"And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"*** In other words, it's the same thing people say about Jesus today. Here's what they're saying: "He's a great guy and a good Bible teacher."

Joe Rogan, Jordan Peterson, Andrew Huberman... All of these secular guys out there appreciate Jesus, and they're surprised that what he's saying is lining up with psychology and science and all of these other things. By the way, what they're saying about Jesus... You could not say better guys than John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. The thing is they don't see Jesus as Lord. It's not until you see Jesus Christ as Lord that it begins to cost you something.

So, here's what he says. Verse 15: ***"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!'"*** By the way, the primary blessing of God in our lives is not possessions or money or health. According to here, he says, "Blessed are you, Simon" because the greatest blessing in our lives is to know who Jesus Christ is. That's what he's saying.

He says, ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*** I want us to see two other things about Christ and the church. The first is that the church belongs to Jesus, and the second is that Jesus is the one who builds the church.

So, the church belongs to Jesus, not a deacon board, not a committee. I've told you before, "For God so loved the world that he did not send a committee." The church does not belong to the wealthy people in the church. The church does not belong to

some powerful family with multiple in-laws in the church. I mean, how many times have you seen this? The church does not belong to a pastor. The church does not belong to a denomination.

Jesus says, "I will build my church." Jesus says he's going to build his church. Now, here's where value and cost come into the picture. The church is very valuable to God and to Christ, and it is very costly to build it. Do you have the same experience I do every once in a while? You just drive and... There are many streets like this, but the first time I moved to Winston-Salem...

Actually, anytime I have a speaker come into town and we drive around and go to lunch, and everything, and we get on Stratford Road and drive through Buena Vista, everybody is like, "Who lives here?" Every once in a while, I'm like, "I don't know. That house is so big, and that is such a prime piece of property. I don't even know who could... That must have been passed down. Is that the Hanes family? Is that the Reynolds family?"

Well, here's what you ask. You look at something, and you go, "How much did that cost? I'm overwhelmed by how big it is and how awesome it is." Well, when you look at the church of Jesus Christ, you have to go, "What did it cost?" Here's the answer: it cost an enormous amount of voluntary suffering. Then you break it into two categories.

It cost an enormous amount of suffering on the part of Jesus Christ to live and to die in our place for our sins, to give all of his blood for us. It cost us the life of the Son of God to build the church. Then, if you're like, "How did we get from twelve disciples to one billion people saying they follow Jesus?" well, the only answer is "voluntary suffering."

Here's what's interesting. As soon as Jesus talks about the church, he cannot talk about the church without talking about the cross. Look at verse 21. ***"From that time..."*** I don't know if you remember this. In the first week, when we were in Matthew, I told you that the phrase *from that time* marks transition. In other words, there was a transition in the book in chapter 4 of Matthew. There's a transition in the book in chapter 16 right here.

"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Remember, Peter just confessed that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. That just happened. Then Jesus starts to talk about the cross.

Remember, when Peter confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, Jesus says to Peter, "On this rock I will build my church." I just read that to you guys. Some people go, "Is Peter the first pope?" The answer to that is "Nope." I'll show you why in a second. You know, do we believe in the pope? Nope. I am constantly fascinated with how often theology is making the headlines. Here we are, 2025, and what has everybody been talking about for the last two weeks? The pope.

Here's what he's saying. The church is built by Jesus but built through people, and it's built through people who confess Christ. Look. You know this. There's always a cost to confessing Christ. This is why baptism is the line in the sand. If a person cannot... And I'm not saying baptism is easy, but it is the first step of obedience.

If a person cannot confess Christ in *this* room where all we want to do is celebrate it, all we want to do is give them a hug afterward, all we want to do is take pictures and get it on video so they can have it... That's all we want to do. We have all of these volunteers, and all we want to do is congratulate them. If they can't stand for Christ in *here*, they will not stand for Christ out *there*.

There's always a cost to confessing Christ. In my mind, I was thinking through several stories. I remember I was a brand-new believer. (Here I go back to my brand-new believer stories.) I'm in public high school, and my Bible falls out of my backpack. Clumsy Kyle, I guess. It was one of those... It kind of looked goofy. Did you ever have those where your name is in cursive on the leather cover? Some of you have that right now. It's okay. It's fine. They're actually nice.

But when you're a 17-year-old boy, that doesn't look very cool. Actually...it's a long story...I got that Bible for free. It's a really cool story. I'll tell you some other time. So, my Bible falls out of my backpack, and the coolest kid in the class sees it. He grabs it and starts making fun of me in front of the whole class. And here I am. I don't know if we can count that as suffering for Christ. I'd like to, if possible.

But I thought, "This is it." At the same time... It's weird. This is what will happen when you suffer. Many suffer like I did. I was embarrassed. I was getting hot, and all that kind of stuff, but when I got by myself afterward, I thought this. Seriously. I had this thought as a 17-year-old: "I'm a real Christian." I was like, "I passed a little test, just a little test." Someone grabbed my Bible and made fun of me at 17, and I said, "No, I *am* a Christian. Give me that!" That's basically what I did.

Well, then I go to Duke University. (I'm worried about telling this story if it ever gets out. I've never told this story before.) Basically, I go to the Religious Life Fair. I'm doing college ministry. I go to the Religious Life Fair, which I thought would be the... Like, "Everyone will want to talk to me about Jesus *there*, right?" Maybe not.

I go there, and I start sharing Christ and building relationships, and then within 24 hours, I get an email from the head of Religious Life at Duke University. Of course it was a woman with a hyphenated last name. Always a warning. She says to me, "I heard that you are aggressively talking to people about Christ. Please do not do that on our campus." This was week one. I just got hired to do this.

I remember I'm sharing the gospel with some freshmen at Duke University, and the one freshman... I can't remember if I've told you guys this story before. It has been a long time if I have. This one freshman says to me, "Oh, this is interesting. Can I talk to you again this next week?" I'm like, "Yeah, you can. Here's my number. Let's go."

So, we get up a couple of days later. I can still remember where I was sitting on the West Campus at Duke. I said, "Hey, man." I shared the bridge diagram with him. I shared the gospel. I said, "What do you want to know?" I'm thinking, "This is awesome." He was Jewish, and he was from New Jersey. I'm like, "Come on! Jews for Jesus. I'm ready."

He sits down with me. He's 18 years old. He goes, "I actually am not interested in talking to you about Christianity." I thought, "Oh no. I'm in trouble." He said, "I wanted to meet with you to tell you I hate what you're doing on our campus." I was like, "What?" First I thought, "I would never talk to someone a decade older than me like this."

I can't even get into the things he said to me, the things he accused me of, that I was trying to take advantage of freshmen when they're brand new to the campus. I was shaking, calling my pastor afterward to help me. There is a danger in going public in confessing Christ.

Here's what it means. It's only once he starts to talk about a confession of Christ that he talks about the cross. I just read that to you. Remember, he says, "I must suffer. I must die." Look at verse 22. ***"And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him..."*** "A-W-K-W-A-R-D! Awkward moment Peter and me." Right? This is like, "What? Peter!" At least he has the decency to pull him aside, I guess. He doesn't talk to him in front of everybody. But Peter is about to rebuke Jesus.

"...saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'" Okay. Here's where this gets real for us. I think, in our flesh, when we hear the cost of discipleship, we respond like Peter. We don't want to suffer. And we don't know. I can't go beyond the text, but it appears from the text... You know, is Peter concerned about Jesus? Maybe, because he loves him.

Who's Peter concerned about? Peter is concerned about Peter. Here's the reason I don't think Peter is the first pope. There are a couple of reasons, but verse 23 would

be at the top of my list. ***"But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"***

Why does Jesus call Peter *Satan*? It's because the last time Jesus spent time with Satan in the wilderness, Satan tried to do the same thing to him that Peter is doing to him now. Do you remember? "Bow down before me, and I'll give you all of the kingdoms."

Here's the satanic spirit. I don't know what you think the satanic spirit is. Do you think it's this scary spirit that... You know, whatever. Here's the satanic spirit: "You can have Christianity without suffering." That there is some shortcut, some hack, and somehow you can have a Christianity that doesn't cost you. You can be a saint without suffering. You can have discipleship without dying to yourself.

He says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man." But look. I want you to drop to verse 24, because Jesus spends the rest of his time... After he talks about his death, he talks about our discipleship, and he connects them. The first word in verse 24 is *then*. So, only after you understand the cross of Christ can you understand what it means for you to be a disciple of Christ. All right. Here it is.

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?'"

I want us to notice a couple of things. The costly call of discipleship... You just have to read it. This text needs very little exposition or explanation. You can just read it and go, "Okay, when I read the straightforward meaning of that text, that's pretty intense."

What I want you to notice, first, is the call to discipleship is a call to all. He says, "If *anyone*..." He doesn't say, "If you want to be in full-time ministry, you've got to do the intense stuff. You've got to follow me. If you want to be a missionary..." We love Jacob. We love our missionaries, but he doesn't say, "If you want to be a missionary, like, if you want to be this elite class of Christian, then you have to take up your cross and follow me."

He makes the call... In fact, in Mark's account of this it says he doesn't just say this to his disciples but that there are crowds. So, Jesus says, "If anyone would want to follow me..." In fact, in another version of this in another gospel it says, "If anyone

desires to follow me..." Here's the first thing: discipleship and the cost of discipleship starts with a deep desire to come after Jesus.

I'm oversimplifying, but in my 24 years of being a Christian, I have seen three desires bring people to Jesus. The first desire is a deep conviction of sin and somewhere to take it. That's probably the most common. You'll just hear that. Someone feels the weight of sin. They read the law of God, and they read the Ten Commandments, and they know what the Bible says, or maybe they got caught or maybe they got addicted or maybe they got in over their head.

So, sometimes the desire to follow Christ comes out of a conviction of sin. That always has to be there at some level. Sometimes the desire to follow Christ comes out of an emptiness. "Man, I have nothing. I have no one. I'm lonely." Christ honors that. Sometimes it's simply a desire for more. It's what Blaise Pascal called the *God-shaped hole in your heart* or the *hole in your soul*.

So, Jesus starts with "If anyone would come after me..." He starts with desire, and here's what he says next: "...he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Here's the thing. I want to talk to us for a second about... Because you read this passage, and if you know the whole Bible, you think... *I can think this sometimes.* Like, "Where's the grace of God in this? This sounds really intense. Where's the 'Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'?" Well, Jesus said that as well.

Here's what Jesus is saying. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said Jesus taught costly grace, but we too often believe in cheap grace. Here's the way I heard it. I heard a pastor tell this story one time, so I'm taking this pastor's story, because it was such a great story. He said he was trying to explain this concept, and it's so helpful.

This is him telling the story. He said, "I'm a pastor, and I don't make a lot of money. One time my son said, 'I want to play on this baseball team.' So I said in front of all of his friends, 'Well, I don't make a lot of money.'" He said that kind of embarrassed him in front of his friends. He said, "I *will* pay for you to play baseball, but here's the rule: if I pay, you play."

He said, "I mean that two ways. If I pay, you play. In other words, you're not quitting. And if I pay, you're going to be good enough to play on the field, because I'm not paying to sit and watch you watch others." In some way, if you can hear this in a gospel-centered, grace-filled way, I think what God is saying is "If I pay (and I did), I want you to play. I have paid too much with my life, with my blood, for you not to play."

So, then he says, "Deny yourself." Now this is interesting. Denying yourself is different than self-denial. Self-denial has its benefits. Every religion on earth has some form of asceticism. It's usually "I need to watch less of *that*, eat less of *that*, and spend less on *this*." I just described all of our New Year's resolutions, basically.

Denying yourself is something different. Probably the best, warmest version of it is it's self-forgetfulness. That's what Tim Keller says. It's the ability to go, "You know what? It's that I no longer have a relationship with the person I used to be before Christ." It says Peter denied Christ. What did he say? "I don't know the man." When you deny yourself, you have to say, "I don't even know the person I used to be."

Here's a practical application of self-denial: you put Christ first and others second in your life, which is so hard, because we live in the selfie culture. Here's the problem: you think about the self without thinking about the soul. Think about the selfie, for example. What does the selfie say? By the way, Taylor Swift years ago... This was interesting. In some article I read, she said nobody asks her for her autograph anymore. Everybody just wants a selfie.

The selfie says, "I'm the center of the world, and everything else is background." Have you ever looked at pictures you're not in and were like, "These are so boring. Can we get to the pictures *I'm* in?" Well, think about all of the words. Let me just give you words...*self-esteem, self-care, self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-help*. Everything is about the self.

Jesus comes in a countercultural, counterintuitive way and says, "Deny yourself," but he says two other things. He says, "Deny yourself, take up your cross..." You know this. That was an instrument of death. You only took up the cross if you were headed one place: Golgotha. Here's what it means. Here's another way. He says in another place to take up your cross *daily*.

I'm just going to quote Scripture. The apostle Paul says, "I die every day." What does it mean? How can you die to yourself daily? For some of you, it's a sin and it's obvious. I mention it right now, and you're like, "I know. I know what it is." For others of you, it's just a good thing that there needs to be less of in your life or it might be a mindset or a mentality toward your spouse or your roommates or your kids.

This is where it gets really interesting. Here's what he says in verse 25: ***"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*** By the way, sometimes when Jesus teaches this he says, "Whoever loses his life will *find* it." Other times he says, "Whoever loses his life will *save* it."

Here's the thing. Sometimes when we say these types of things... I know this just from being a Bible teacher for years. A lot of times, we'll say these phrases, like, "If you want to save your life, you need to lose it," and everyone is like, "Amen!" Then they're like, "I don't know what it means. It sounds great." It's like, "Yeah! Preach it!" It's like, "I don't know what it means."

Okay. Let me give you three examples. When you get married, you lose your life and find a new life. Right? Every guy gets married, and he's like, "She wants to go to bed at the same time as me every night. She wants to spend a lot of time with me." You lose your life, but what I'm trying to say is what you end up finding is something even better.

Here's a better example. When you have kids, you lose your life. You lose sleep, and you lose your mind. You lose all of it. Seriously. It's weird. Those of you who are in stages like this, you know. Do you feel this way, those of you who are married or parents? And, grandparents, you probably have your own version of this. You can't remember your life before it.

I can't even remember my life as a single person. It has been over 15 years. I can't even remember what it was like before I had kids. I've had kids now for 13 years. What happens when you get a career? Well, a very simple way to say it is you lose being able to do everything to do one thing. This is an element of faith, guys. It's hard to explain. C.S. Lewis says when you lose your life, you end up finding who you really are in Christ. If you allow him to work in you, you find out who he really wanted you to be.

Here's how he ends. He ends by talking about value. We talked about cost and value. Here's how Jesus ends. Verse 26: ***"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world..."*** This is why it's so helpful. What does it mean to save your life? Well, just read the next verse. Jesus says to gain the world is the exact same thing as to save our life.

How many of us are trying to save our lives? We're trying to improve and prolong our lives all the time. That's why there's this overly unhealthy obsession with health, with supplements, with Botox, with trying to look completely... I mean, how many of us are constantly trying to look way younger than we really are? We're trying to save our lives.

Here's what it is. He says, ***"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"*** Jesus goes, "I can't just talk about the self; I have to talk about the soul." He says, ***"Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"*** For each of you, it looks different of what it would look like if you gained the whole world.

The classic American dream is "What if you had the awesome house with the awesome cars with the awesome family with the job that was meaningful that also gave you a lot of freedom and flexibility, and then on top of that you had great health?" Whatever it is for you. It's different for different people and different cultures.

Jesus is going, "What would it profit you if you gained all of that and lost your soul?" He ends with saying there is nothing more valuable than the soul. You are not a body with a soul. Primarily, you are a soul with a body, and when you die, that will be the end of your body until God resurrects it, but it will not be the end of you.

So, here's what I want to end with. The only thing more costly than following Jesus Christ is *not* following Jesus Christ. One of the free things you learn in life is no one is getting out of here alive. We're all going to have to die. We're all going to suffer. You can either decide, "I'm going to live my life *with* Christ" or "I'm going to live my life *apart* from Christ."

Look. I'm not trying to be some old-school, "fire and brimstone" preacher, but the Bible says there is heaven and there is hell, and if we do not repent and if we do not enter the kingdom of God, it is very, very costly. That's why Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay the penalty and suffer the punishment in your place.

Listen. He died, yes, to forgive your sins and to set you free, but when you think about that... If those are the two things the death of Christ does...forgives and sets free...well, why did he forgive you and set you free? So you could be a disciple. Jesus doesn't ever ask us to do anything he didn't go first in. He's never going to ask us to suffer more than he has suffered.

So, if you'll close your eyes and bow your heads, I want to give you a chance to think about the cost of discipleship in your life. I don't know if there's an area right now that you would just say... You don't have to do this. Maybe you want to put your palms up and say, "Lord, I just want to give something to you."

The cost of discipleship starts with realizing and recognizing the cost that Christ paid to purchase you as a disciple. Some of you need to decide "I need to start confessing Christ publicly," and some of you need to get baptized at our next Baptism Sunday. Maybe you just commit that to the Lord right now.

Others of you... You know there's a cost. You're going to make a decision to confess Christ, and you're going to start telling people you've never told before about Christ, and you're going to feel the cost of that. For some of you, it is, "I've got to deny myself in some area, and I've got to start saying no so I can say yes more to Jesus."

Lord, I pray a spirit of sacrifice over this church. My favorite definition of *sacrifice* is giving up something we love for something we love even more. Lord, I pray that we would have a deep love in this church for you that would teach us that when we lose our life, in you we find it, Lord. What we get to do, even as we deny ourselves and take up our cross... That's not our focus. Our focus is not self-denial and taking up our cross. Our focus is on how that's going to help us better follow you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.