

The Cost of Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] Yeah. Thank you, Alex. Alex is phenomenal in so many ways. Thank you for that. As she just said, my name is Alan. I am one of the pastors here, and it's just a great honor to have you. We've been working through the book of Mark, the Gospel of Mark, which is an absolutely phenomenal book for a good while now, and we're learning two very important aspects of Christianity. The first one is, who is this Jesus? We really get to take a deep look into who Jesus is, and then what does it look like to follow him? What does a true disciple of Jesus look like? Up to this point, through the first eight chapters, we've mainly witnessed and learned about who this Jesus is and what he's all about, but now we're starting to pivot. We're going to enter into a turning point where we're going to begin to see what it means to be a disciple of Christ. We're now pivoting into what scholars call the great discipleship discourse. Three times over the next two and a half chapters, we see Jesus predict his passing and then subsequent resurrection. We see this in chapter 8, verses 31 through 33, chapter 9, 30 through 32, and then chapter 10, 32 through 34, and we're going to be hitting all of those over the next few weeks, but today we're going to be looking at the first one. So immediately following each time, Jesus instructs them, his disciples, concerning true discipleship and what it means to truly follow him because they just do not get it.

I mean, it's pretty straightforward today for us, but back then it wasn't. The word Christian means little Christ, so therefore if we are to call ourselves Christians, then we should act and do what we see Jesus doing in the Bible, right? It's pretty simple. However, this is proven to be difficult for all mankind, for all time. Why? David Platt wrote a book called *Radical*, and he said it like this. He says, we American Christians have a way of taking the Jesus of the Bible and twisting him into a version of Jesus that we are more comfortable with. A nice, middle-class American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn't mind materialism and would never call us to give away everything we have.

A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who, for the matter, wants us to avoid danger altogether. A Jesus who brings comfort and prosperity to us as we live out our Christian spin on the American dream. That's pretty straightforward. If you know David Platt, that's how he rolls.

Jesus and his disciples have been together for some time now. They've traveled with him throughout Galilee and have watched as he has healed the diseased and the disabled and so many troubled people. He has told parables. He's fed thousands of people with just a few scraps of food. He's walked on the water. He's controlled the wind and the waves. He stood up to the criticism of the religious leaders. We've seen all this over the past few chapters. And finally, the day comes when Jesus pops the question, if you will. He asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? You know, what's the word on the street kind of thing? And not surprisingly, not much has changed from then to now. Everybody has a different opinion about this Jesus. The disciples replied, some people say you are John the Baptist. Others say Elijah and still others, one of the prophets. Then Jesus looked at his 12 disciples, his inner circle, if you will. He says, but what about you? Who do you say that I am?

[3 : 57] And if you know Peter, it was Peter who answered for them, you are the Christ. Of course, this was the right answer. If Peter had been taking a multiple choice quiz, he would have gotten an A plus for sure.

But if he had been asked to write an essay on what it meant, he would have failed miserably. Start in Mark 8, 31 through 33, says, and he began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And that's where he lost them. And after three days, rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

And isn't this where all of us are in one way or another? We are no different from Peter. Peter was on board with Jesus as the Messiah. Peter was not on board with Jesus going to the cross.

As Jesus rebuked the demons back in Mark 3, 12, Peter now rebukes Jesus. Jesus responds to Peter's rebukes by treating Peter as if he were Satan or a demon-possessed man. Peter is acting like Satan in the wilderness temptation that we see back in Mark chapter 1. He offers Jesus the crown without the cross. You know, back in Mark chapter 1, after Jesus' baptism, he was led into the wilderness for 40 days without food. He fasted for 40 days and he was tempted to eat. That's a big temptation.

I'm tempted to eat three to four times a day and I say yes. You know what I mean? I mean, look at me. He then tempts him with wealth and power. Which of us here today are not tempted with the same?

[6 : 00] We all want financial freedom. Most of us want two million followers on Instagram. We want to be an influencer. I want to be like Dude Perfect.

That was for my son. He's a big Dude Perfect fan. Peter thinks he has a better plan than God does, which sounds really arrogant when reading this passage. I mean, think about that. Peter, this lowly fisherman, uneducated man, thinks he has a better plan than the creator of the universe. I must admit I've done the same. Peter didn't have a clue what it meant to be the Christ or the Messiah. But like the rest of Israel in that time, Peter thought that God's Messiah would be a great warrior king like King David, but on steroids. He would have great power and restore Israel, both nationally and religiously. He was going to kick the Roman Empire out. He believed Jesus was going to overthrow them. So far, Peter had witnessed Jesus' great power in many ways. He knew Jesus was special. And so Peter had the right term for who Jesus was, but not the right meaning. After Jesus rebukes Peter, he calls the crowd over to him, for there were many more people than just the 12 disciples who were following Jesus. Pick it back up in verse 34 of chapter 8.

If anyone would come after me, he must 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 and for the gospels will save it. It's pretty straightforward, isn't it? But what does it mean? It means God's will is often a challenge, but we must remember it is perfect. Jesus tells us what it means to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. He will face betrayal, denial, suffering, death, and finally, resurrection.

That's tough, but that's okay. That's all right. We can accept that, right? I mean, it's not something we have to go through ourselves. But is that true? But he also tells us what it means to be one of his disciples, one of his followers. And sometimes I wonder if I have got this one figured out yet.

As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure I do not have this figured out yet. Sure, I can say the right words. I mean, I've been in church my whole life. From a week old, I've been in church. I can believe the right things, but can I live this life? Do I live this life? That's a better question.

[8 : 41] I believe in Jesus Christ. I've always believed in Jesus Christ. I prayed daily. Like I said, I grew up going to church. I knew a lot about the Christian faith by watching and listening to and being loved by many of Jesus' disciples in my church. I had a lot of grace surrounding me.

Have I been like the Israelites, though, back during the times of Exodus, when they were wandering in the wilderness, so often complaining to Moses, and why didn't you leave us in Egypt? We were better off as slaves making bricks with barely any straw for Pharaoh. That was a much better life.

You know why we struggle with this? I know why. Because grace is free, but it's not cheap. Grace is free, but it's not cheap. And being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not an instant fix.

It's a lifelong journey of commitment and learning and falling down and getting back up again. And even if I get it right sometimes, do I get it right all the time or even most of the time? And when I'm getting it right, am I really loving my neighbor selflessly, or do I have other motives?

Stepping on any toes this morning? I've been stepping on mine the whole week. In verse 34, Jesus says, we must deny self. The self-centered life must be put to death.

[10 : 09] Let me give you a hint. Self has been the problem ever since the garden. And self continues to be the problem right now. Most parents, all parents could tell you about a really troubling time called the terrible twos. Sometimes it turns into the terrible threes. When the whole world revolves around that child and that need for comfort. Well, parents can also tell you about the terrible twelves and then the terrible 22s. And let me tell you something. My family and friends could probably tell you about the terrible 48s. That's my age, by the way. Unfortunately, as we grow older, our craving for comfort and a comfortable life grows deeper and stronger. Right? All of us have a terrible two inside of us. Jesus says, deny yourself. Deny that terrible two-year-old inside of you. Put off the old self, which is being corrupted, and put on the new self. Ephesians 4, 22 and 24 says, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of

God and true righteousness and holiness. Self stands in the way of taking up the cross. The people listening to Jesus knew exactly what taking up the cross meant. They had already watched the Romans crucify over 2,000 Galileans. Imagine the impression this must have made. And Jesus took up the cross, not because he had to. He took up the cross because of a fully perfect, selfless love for you and me.

And we are called to take up the cross as well. But as long as self remains, we will be forever seeking painless shortcomings to the kingdom. If this sounds easy, it's not. It's a tricky work because the flesh inside of us is always there, even in our best and most religious moments.

A 19th century theologian named Abraham Kuyper said, self, big and inflated, is not hard to deny. But self shrunk. Hiding behind pious emotions and piles of good works is extremely dangerous.

For what is there to be denied? There is scarcely anything left. His only end in view is the glory of God, at least so he thinks. But he is mistaken. Self is still there. It's like a spring tightly bent for a time, only to rebound with accumulated force. And what was called self-denial is really nothing less than the self taking care of itself. We will try and try again to come up with another way that doesn't involve the cross.

[13 : 07] But only when we deny self and take up the cross can we truly follow Jesus. The apostle Paul, the first man to bring the message of Jesus outside of the Jewish realm, admitted several times in his writings that he had a hard time following Jesus.

But he said, I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of me. Paul understood the importance of denying self and that this act wasn't a one and done event.

This wasn't a one-off fork in the road moment. Jesus knew the same thing. And in Luke, he added a key word to the success or failure of true discipleship. Luke 9, 23, and he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Jesus knew and experienced this daily denial to self. And he knew that for us to be successful as disciples, we must do the same. For the rest of our lives, we will experience this tug of war between our old self and new self, as we just read about in Ephesians.

How about you? How's it going with this tug of war? How is this discipleship thing working out for you? How far along are you? Do you find yourself getting discouraged?

[14 : 25] You want to throw in the towel? Do you sometimes doubt if it's actually worth it? There's nothing more difficult and nothing more worthwhile than being a disciple, a follower, student of Jesus Christ.

It is what gives us hope in the midst of a lost and broken world. It is what causes us to love. And if for just a moment we can forget about self, we do catch a true glimpse of God's kingdom, if just for a moment.

And that's worth a million lifetimes and all the money and fame and attention and power and whatever else we run after in this world. Now, I will say that taking up your cross and denying self does not mean we are to accept abuse and manipulation.

Please understand me on that. Taking up your cross does not mean putting up with difficult people. Like your alcoholic uncle or your manipulative parent.

That's not what I'm saying. Nor does it mean that we should add more suffering to our lives or let people victimize and abuse us in a psychologically twisted way. Everyone in Jesus' day knew what a cross meant.

[15 : 37] Obviously. Eventually it became an instrument of death. But that's probably not what Jesus was referring to here. When you took up your cross, it meant, first of all, that you were going to be ridiculed, spat upon, and persecuted for your faith.

So in other words, Jesus is saying, be my friend, follow me, join me. Even if it means that you get in trouble. Even if it means that you become an outcast and a rebel. You go against the grain of your culture.

So this isn't an invitation to allow people to abuse you. It's a specific invitation to follow Jesus. Even when we're ridiculed and mocked. Then Jesus goes on to say in verses 36 and 38.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the son of man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.

Jesus asked, for what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life? The answer is nothing. Then he says, what can a man give in exchange for his life? It's the same answer, nothing.

[16 : 50] In this ultimate challenge, Jesus is talking about new life. Not just a religious program or a three-step process to a better life. Underneath everything in this challenge, these words of Jesus ring out to us.

Matthew 11, 28. Come to me, all who are tired and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. This is the essence of Christian spirituality. The apostle Paul put it this way in Galatians 2, 20.

I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Christ is in you. That is our life. John Piper explains it this way.

What's the opposite of being ashamed of somebody? Being proud of them. Admiring them. Not being embarrassed to be seen with them. Loving to be identified with them. So Jesus is saying, if you were embarrassed by me and the price I paid for you, and he's not referring to lapses of courage when you don't share your faith, but a settled state of your heart toward him.

If you're not proud of me, and you don't cherish me and what I did for you, if you want to put yourself with the goats that value their reputation in the goat herd more than they value me, then that's the way I will view you when I come.

[18 : 06] I will be ashamed of you, and you will perish with the people who consider me an embarrassment. We are called to be different. Not in a weird, repulsive way, like standing with a bullhorn on the corner telling everybody they must turn or burn.

That's weird. Don't do that. Don't do that. No, we're to be kind. We're to be generous. We're to be loving and gracious, and we're to possess integrity and humility, just to name a few.

We must come to a realization and then fully embrace the self-serving life must be put to death. How do I detect the workings of my flesh?

How do I know what to deny? That's tricky, and it will take a lifetime to learn the ways of your flesh. We can begin by acknowledging the depth and persistence of the flesh. It's there when I rage at another driver.

But it's also there when I sing nice worship songs. That's why I have to constantly, as the Bible says, walk in the Spirit.

[19 : 17] Which means that I'm constantly open, asking and seeking the direction of the Holy Spirit. Asking God to search me primarily through his words in the Bible and his words through other people.

Being accountable to one or two other really trusted people is a game changer. Where you can really take your mask off.

Where you can really be real. That's a game changer. Don't do that to everyone. Please. One or two people. Asking God to search me.

That's why the Apostle Paul could say, I die daily. That means that every day of your life will present opportunities to deny your inflated, pompous, wounded child self.

Every day we have the marvelous, wonderful good news of saying no to that flesh part of ourselves that ultimately robs us. And everyone around us. Of true joy. Jesus challenges the myth of safety.

[20 : 20] The lie that life should be and must be completely safe and risk free. It's not true. The seduction that we must arrange our life to avoid danger.

We are basically safety fanatics in this country. We spend an enormous amount of energy and money killing germs. Buckling up. Wearing helmets.

Etc. Please don't understand me. Safety is a good thing. Wear your helmet. Wear your helmet. Wear your helmet. But listen to this.

If you want to follow Jesus, you might get hurt. You might get killed. That's a big one. And that's not the worst thing that could happen to you. Did you hear that word?

Wait a minute. Jesus, did you say some of us are going to get killed? In his book entitled The History of Christian Mission, author Stephen Neal shows that the first 300 years after Jesus' life, his followers were often under threat.

[21 : 24] Every Christian, every Christian he wrote knew that sooner or later he might have to testify to his faith at the cost of his life. Did you hear that word?

Might. For them, it was a matter of maybe. Maybe. Maybe we'll have to die for our faith. And maybe not. I'd say that's not the case for us or the mentality that we have here today.

To be honest, the Christian community acts like a bunch of whiners when someone threatens our safety or whenever our beliefs are criticized. We want to right our legislatures and flex our political or cultural muscles.

Or we turn down a service opportunity due to a ridiculously high safety standard. I heard a story of a man who felt called to a certain mission project in a foreign country. Then he watched a National Geographic special about an insect that lives in that country.

Apparently, this bug burrows its larvae under your skin and it can be painful and itchy. So he decided not to go. The bug, a little bug, scared him off.

[22 : 30] I mean, look, look, look now. That doesn't sound very appealing to me. Okay? I don't want some insect living in my skin. But when we have the mentality that Jesus paid it all and all to him I owe.

I had the privilege of going to Guatemala three times. And places I stayed were not the most sanitary. Let's just say it was not the Maui Sheraton Resort.

Okay? And there's a couple of things you don't do. You don't drink the water. Don't drink the water. And if you get a chicken sandwich, don't eat the lettuce. Otherwise, you're going to have problems.

And to be honest, I really didn't go with the heart of Jesus. I went because it was an adventure. I'm like, I get an opportunity to travel. I love to travel. But I saw things.

I saw people physically healed. I saw people who had nothing. Living in dirt floor tin sheds that possessed real joy and faith changed my life.

[23 : 39] I want to go back. I want my kids to experience that level of reality. I want all of you to experience that level of reality. I don't want any of you to live a life that is all about self.

The truth of the matter is, and if you will stop and really be honest with yourself, that life is full of unsustainable joy. You put your faith, hope, and trust into something, anything other than Jesus, and it will ultimately disappoint.

Deep down inside, you know I'm hitting the nerve. You know I'm speaking the truth. We just can't let go of our apparent control.

But if we can find enough courage to let go and fully trust Jesus, we can experience a life that doesn't make sense to the world. But it's a life full of hope, peace, joy, contentment.

We understand the real reward for being a disciple of Christ. Real discipleship is glorious. Jesus, Mark 9, 1, and he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

[24 : 51] Jesus was giving his disciples and the surrounding crowd a little taste of what is to come. They didn't know it at that moment, but Peter, James, and John would experience what we read later on in chapter 9 as the transfiguration.

Jesus shows his true radiance and God-like qualities to those three men. This same experience awaits all of us that will call out to his name and follow him.

A place where we can be done with all of this suffering and striving and dealing with sickness and death. No more hunger, no more grief, no more pain. Can you imagine a life where you are free from worry, fear, and anxiety?

Jesus is saying, come. And even though life can be hard and not able to be understood at all times, Jesus says, I will give you hope and peace. Hope that one day all of those things of this world will no longer be.

Peace that even though the whole world may appear to be unraveling around you, you can sustain it, even thrive in the midst of it. As the band comes up, if you're here listening, not yet a follower of Jesus.

[25 : 59] Not yet a follower of Jesus. Jesus, first of all, thank you so much for being here with us today. I know it takes courage to be here. I hope you have felt welcomed.

The question I have for you today is, what or who have you put your faith, hope, and trust in that has not disappointed or hurt you? You may be able to answer that question with a truthful answer, but I assure you that one day that answer will change.

And then what? Will you continue to pursue the temporary things of this world, or will you admit that you need help? Jesus is the help you need.

I promise you, you will not regret it. There will be a prayer on the screen behind me that will help you ask for help.

That'll be up in just a minute. If you're here or listening to a follower of Jesus Christ, how's your battle with denying self been? How's that battle been going for you? If you were like me, it tends to flow in trends.

[27 : 01] Sometimes I'm crushing it. Sometimes it's crushing me. Some days I am ready to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth. And others, I can be the most self-centered person known to man.

Yep. We serve this God who is quick to forgive, and his grace is sufficient for all of our shortcomings. But don't you get tired of dealing with the guilt and shame? I look forward to the day when this constant state of tug of war between flesh and spirit is done.

How about you? If you've been failing at denying yourself, let me encourage you to stop. Redirect yourself back to Christ and remember the why.

Because Jesus did pay it all. And for that reason alone, we should strive to deny ourself and truly follow him. Let me encourage you to take a few moments to do business with God.

And then we're going to proceed with communion. Let me see you soon.