

## “Give Up Everything?”

A patient at a dentist’s office tried to joke about her anxiety at being there by listing her middle name as “Wimp”. A little later a dental assistant, playing along with the gag, stepped into the waiting room and said, “The doctor will now see the wimp.” All 4 people sitting in the waiting room got up!

There are a lot of people who think Christianity is for wimps! Men, who think religion is for the *ladies*. High school kids, who think going to church is for losers. Others, who think believing the Bible is only for those who are simple-minded and naïve, and relying on God is only for weaklings and those unable to make it on their own. Being a Christian is for wimps!

*Really?* Do you think it's easy to follow Jesus? Listen to some of the things Jesus said His followers must do: "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). Love your enemies? If somebody hates you, do good to them? If someone curses you, bless them? How easy is that?

And Jesus said forgive people who have hurt you. Are we tough enough for that? He said not only are our *outward actions* to be above reproach, but our *inward motives* are to be pure and free of selfish intents. He said His followers are to acknowledge Him before others, that no matter where we are or who we’re with, we should not be ashamed to be known as a Christian.

***Jesus said if we’re going to be a Christian it will require a rigorous, radical relinquishment of our self to Him!*** Turn to Luke, chapter 14. *Are you ready for some tough, eye-opening words of Jesus?* Crowds followed Jesus to hear what He had to say. He was becoming a crowd favorite! And in the midst of that popular adulation, Jesus turns to them and says there are 3 *demanding* things we must be willing to do or we can’t be a disciple – a follower. Sometimes churches today, in an effort to get more members, will water down their requirements and soften their message. Not Jesus – He laid down strict demands in order to weed out the non-committed.

The first thing we have to be willing to do is this: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). What in the world does He mean? Hate family members! Isn’t this the same Jesus who said we are to love everyone? That’s confusing! Does this mean if I’m a Christian I should hate my wife Nancy? Hate my mother? Hate our 3 children? Isn’t there enough of this hate in the world without Jesus adding fuel to the fire? Or, is Jesus using exaggerated language to drive home the point that our loyalty to Him and His will has to be absolutely first – even above love for family members? If we're not willing to put Him above family, we can’t be a disciple!

Check out the next verse. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). If we're going to be a disciple or follower of Jesus we must be willing to carry the cross. The cross has been softened and trivialized today. We make crosses into fine jewelry. But those who heard Jesus mention “cross” knew what He meant. He meant *death*. The

cross was a form of execution! Roman roads were lined with criminals hanging on crosses! We want to be a disciple? We've got to be so committed that we're willing to die for this!

The third thing we have to be willing to do if we're to be a disciple is just as outlandish! "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Luke 14:33). Give up all our possessions – everything? Whoa! Now in the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus literally did this! They sold their possessions, pooled their resources, and shared with other believers who had needs (cf. Acts 4:32ff).

I told you these words of Jesus might shake us up! Jesus didn't water down His message just to swell the ranks of followers. He didn't say "Life will be soft and easy if you follow Me!" He said it would probably be the hardest thing we ever do!

Jesus told two stories to help people understand that they have to consider the cost before rushing into saying, "I want to be a Christian!" "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30). You wouldn't want to start building a house without first being sure you have enough building materials to finish it, right? I remember a high rise building I would pass on the way to a hospital in Chester, PA. The exterior of the structure was there, but it was never finished. What an eyesore, and what an embarrassment, I'm sure, to whoever started the never-finished building!

Jesus goes on: "Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace" (Luke 14:31-32). What military leader would rush headlong into a battle when he or she knows their troops are outnumbered two to one?

Then those shocking words of Jesus: "Any of you who does not give up everything he has, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Have any of us here given up everything to follow Jesus? Does that mean there are no disciples of Jesus in this church?

What are you feeling right now? What are we to do with these words of Christ? Maybe you're thinking, "This is ridiculous. This is not very realistic". "This sermon just makes me feel guilty." Perhaps you're irritated, thinking, "Boy, this is a real downer. I should have stayed home today." (Please remember, what we've been looking at are the words of Jesus, not *my* words. I'm just His local representative! As they say, "Don't shoot the messenger!").

Now I could say, "Jesus is just kidding. He didn't really mean what He said." But you don't want me to do that, do you? Barbara Brown Taylor is a pastor. She tells of what happened one morning when she preached a sermon entitled "The Unfettered Word." This is how she describes it: "Who knows what it was about. All I remember is the man who came out (of church) afterwards – a well-heeled fellow, looking slightly stunned – who told me God had

spoken to him during the sermon that morning. He was going to quit his job on Monday. He was going to sell his car. He was going to change his life, he said, to which I said, ‘Good grief! It was only a sermon! Sleep on it! Go get a cup of coffee! See how you feel in the morning.’”

But you see, that radical kind of getting up, and leaving all, was exactly what the first disciples did when Jesus came their way and invited them to follow Him!

***What does all this mean for you and me, right now?*** I can't tell you what it means for you. I can tell you that I've wrestled with these words of Jesus over and over throughout my life – this audacious challenge to “give up everything” for Jesus.

*Some have done that.* A few years ago I came to know a young man who had a very good paying job in a local firm. He was married, with several children. Someone who worked with him told me that he had felt the call of Christ to sell his home, and just be open to where God would lead him. He started a ministry of consulting with churches. He set no fees for his work – people were to give as God laid it on their heart. He trusted God to provide, and he trusted God to lead him where the Lord wanted him to go. We used him at the church I was serving as a consultant – and I came to appreciate him greatly. When some of us first heard what he did, part of the scuttlebutt was, “This guy's crazy to give all that up.” But I think another part of us was envious that here was someone willing to lay his life on the line, in a costly way, for the Lord Jesus!

But I don't think Jesus asks everyone to sell their home, sell their cars, give up their jewelry, clear out their bank accounts, for Him. Not everyone in the New Testament who followed Jesus did that. Most of us aren't going to sell our home and car and give up all our possession to follow Jesus – for we need a house to live in, a car to get around, money for food and clothes. We've got obligations to our children, perhaps to aging parents, etc.

*But here's what I think is the crux of the matter: Would you and I BE WILLING to give up anything – or everything - if God told us to do it? Are we willing to give God a blank check and say, “God, you can do anything you want with me. I'll go anywhere you say, I'll do anything you ask.”* If I can't say that and mean it, I can't be a disciple! (Hey, this stuff isn't for wimps!)

***Why is Jesus asking so much and demanding so much?*** See, being a real Christian isn't like joining a fitness club or a civic club or the fire company. It's not just an additional activity that we add onto our busy life. *It has to do with our basic reason for living.* To say we want to follow Jesus means that we set a course and direction for our life: every decision we make, every value we hold, is measured against Jesus' teaching and example! *This is what it means to say Jesus is “Lord” of our life!*

Jesus says sometimes this will cause conflict in our families. Our parents or siblings might not be a Christian. Our spouse may not be a believer. And so they'll have different values and different priorities. A person may feel called to be a pastor or a chaplain, and his or her spouse may drag their feet. A wife may be involved in church, and her unsaved husband may complain

that she's spending too much time doing church stuff. But Jesus says doing His will takes priority over the wishes of family members. Someone has observed that military people often will do a tour of duty and be separated from their family 6 months or a year, and we praise that person, because they're doing it for their country. But if someone chooses to be separated from their family and make that sacrifice for Christ, some will say that person's a religious fanatic or neglecting his or her family.

And Jesus says sometimes when we follow Him it will mean bearing a cross of suffering. Because many don't accept the Bible, or have Christian values, living as a disciple may mean that we will be laughed at, or left out of certain groups, or in some countries today it may mean being disowned by our family or even murdered! But Jesus didn't pull any punches. He was right up front about it. He said we'd have to be willing to bear a cross of suffering if we follow Him. *Yes, and even "give up everything" - give up our right to run our own life!*

But can I leave you in on a little secret! On the surface, it seems like all bad news. Gosh – who in their right mind would be willing to do this? But, Jesus says, “Once you're willing to pay the price, you are in for the surprise of your life! Because instead of finding it drudgery, and misery, giving yourself completely over to Me will bring a joy and rewards that you never dreamed of!" For whatever we may have to give up to follow Christ we'll get back infinitely more!

Note what it says in Mark 10:28-30: "Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions - and in the age to come eternal life!'. Jesus says we'll get back a "hundredfold" compared to what we give up. It won't be easy - notice, he says there will be "persecutions", but we will get back infinitely more. And on top of that, *eternal life!* The Apostle Paul experienced this: "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

*The more of ourselves we give over to Him, the more joy and fulfillment we get! The more we hold back from Him, the less joy and satisfaction we get!* That is a spiritual law of life! Jesus once said if we seek to save our life and keep it for ourselves, we'll lose it, but if we give up our life for Him and the gospel, we will find it! Jim Elliot, one of 5 missionaries killed by Auca Indians of Ecuador, had a saying by which he lived: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

So, you think Christianity is for wimps? No. It will be the toughest thing you will ever do to live as a *real* disciple of Jesus. But the great causes and the great achievements always call for people sold out and devoted to the task...the Olympic athlete who trains for years...the concert pianist who gives up a lot of other pursuits to be that good. The greatest cause in the world is the cause of Christ! Getting His message out to the world!

A Harris survey, commissioned by United Airlines, asked people whether or not they used the lavatory during a flight. 38% of the passengers said they never use the lavatory during a flight. 60% said they do. And another 2% aren't sure! *Aren't sure!!*

*Are you a disciple of Jesus?* I hope your answer isn't "I'm not sure!" Because we can be real disciples of Jesus and be sure of it! It won't be easy, but here's how. It will mean putting everything we have and everything we are at His disposal, holding back nothing. We'll go where He wants us to go, do what He wants us to do. We'll keep what He says we can keep, and give away what He says to let go of. But in the end, we will have a joy and satisfaction we can't imagine. We will experience *life!*

And folks, if this church is to experience a turnaround and start growing again, it will take more of us becoming fully committed, radical followers of Jesus! Will you be one of them?

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