

I think that it may be more of a guy thing. Ever since I can remember, I had a dream car. Doesn't everybody have a dream car? Isn't that almost American? Along with Mom and apple pie? There are a lot of great cars out there. I always loved Mustangs and Camaros but my dream car was always the Corvette. **(Picture of 2014 Corvette)**. Personally, I think it'd be a great donation to our *Building Changed Lives Together* Campaign. Someone would need to test drive it for a few weeks to make sure it's okay to sell before putting the money in our building fund. I'd have to volunteer. I think I've only ridden in one Corvette and I've never driven one. Friends who owned one never picked up on my subtle hints that it'd be nice if they let me drive their Corvette. I probably need to work at being less subtle.

The problem is that I have Corvette taste with a Chevy bank account. **What's the Bottom Line?** Well, at a starting price of \$50k for the 2014 model, Jane has assured me that it's not in the budget.

In Luke 14:25-35 (p. 874) Jesus shares **What's the Bottom Line?** message. Turn with me there. This passage is about counting the cost.

Pollster, George Gallup, contends that fewer than 10% of evangelical Christians could be called deeply committed. Most of those who profess Christianity don't know basic teachings and don't act differently because of their Christian experience.

The fact is that one of the most accurate indicators of our commitment to Christ is our checkbook. It's not what we say. It's not even where we go or what we do. The depth of our Christianity, the depth of our commitment to Christ, is found in that part of our life that is hidden to nearly everyone but the Lord Jesus, our handling of the finances that He's entrusted to us – our giving. This passage intersects where we live. It shows us the cost of following Christ and teaches us that: ***To truly follow Jesus Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else.***

A paradox of salvation is that it is both absolutely free and yet it costs you your very life. The Bible knows no Jesus as Savior without Jesus as Lord. That's idolatry. So we receive salvation freely at no expense to us, but once you receive it, you've just committed everything you are and have to Jesus.

Now you may be thinking, "Scott, that's a contradiction! How can something be both free and costly at the same time?"

Let me illustrate this. Suppose I had a desire to climb Mount Everest and it costs about \$70,000 to do it. I don't have that kind of money. Suppose Warren Buffet hears about this wacky preacher who wants to climb Everest and he offers to pay for the entire expedition. He buys all of the expensive clothing and gear, pays for my transportation, (he makes sure I ride in a Corvette on my way to the airport). He pays for my guides and training. It's totally free for me. **But** if I accept his free offer, I've just committed myself to months of difficult training. It could cost me my life. Lots of climbers die trying to climb Mount Everest. It's free, yet it's very costly.

Or, consider a friend who offers me a free ride in his airplane. He invites me to come along at his expense. **But** in accepting his free offer, I've just committed my very life to him. If he flies safely, I'm safe. If he crashes, I die. So the instant I say yes to his free offer and get in the plane, I'm totally committed to him. I've entrusted my very life into his hands.

Jesus Christ freely offers the gift of eternal life to everyone who will come to the Cross, but we must understand that when we receive His free offer, we're no longer our own. We've been bought with a price. To truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and not begin to follow Him superficially, only to turn back later when things get tough. And that's what Jesus warns against in our text. To be a Christian, it's all or nothing. That includes one of the vital parts of our lives as American believers – our money. So let's work through this today. If you're taking notes...

1. It's possible to follow Christ casually and superficially. Verse 25 is crucial for interpreting what follows. The New American Standard is clearer, "*Now large crowds were going along with Him.*" Every pastor would love to have that kind of congregation. Churches love big crowds. Every ministry desires more followers. Pastors with large congregations get TV deals, have their books published and are invited to speak all over the world because they're successful. We measure success by numbers. But Jesus is different. Large crowds didn't fool Him. He knew that many were following Him for selfish or superficial reasons. It was cool. It was the exciting thing to do. Maybe you or someone you knew would be healed. But Jesus was not a false recruiter. He wanted to weed out those who followed Him for superficial reasons, because when the battle heated up, He knew that they'd fall away and damage His cause. So He turned to the great multitude and outlines for them these demands of discipleship.

At the outset I need to point out that when someone comes to Christ, the Bible teaches that they're a baby Christian. My niece just had a baby. Lorelei. Lorelei is about a month old now. They're not enrolling her in school. They're not handing her the car keys. She's a baby. She'll grow into those things.

New believers, baby Christians, must grow as disciples. While we never perfectly arrive in this life (Phil. 3:12), if a person claims to be a believer and isn't growing in their Christian life, and worse, isn't seeking to grow in obedience to Christ, he/she is fooling themselves. In Paul's words, "*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works*" (Titus 1:16). So **It's possible to follow Christ casually and superficially.** And it's to such followers that Jesus lays out the cost of discipleship. Thus...

2. To follow Christ truly, we must consider the bottom line. Jesus lays out two of the costs of discipleship: "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple*" (14:26-27). He follows that with two parables (14:28-32) which make the same overall point, namely, that a person must give careful consideration to the cost before he rashly jumps into it. Then, He states a third cost of discipleship (14:33). He then (14:34-35) gives an illustration about salt to illustrate the cost of not truly following Him. He concludes by warning, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

Before we look at the bottom line Jesus spells out, think with me for a moment about the phrases, "*sit down and calculate the cost,*" referring to the man building the tower (14:28); and, "*sit down and take counsel,*" referring to the king considering going to war (14:31). Both refer to careful, detailed, rational thinking in which you consider all aspects of what you're getting into before you make the commitment. Such careful thinking is opposed to an impulsive decision made in a moment of intense emotion, with little thought about the consequences. So here, Jesus says to the crowds who were interested enough to be going along with Him, "*Consider the cost of following Me.*" That

means that...

a. Each of us must consider the bottom line of following Jesus. Jesus spells out **three costs**.

1) We must hate our families and ourselves (14:26). Whoa! Doesn't the Bible say we're to love our families? Doesn't it say that no man ever hated his own flesh? Is Jesus contradicting the Bible? Of course not! But He puts it in these terms for shock value! He wants us to stop and think about the stringent demand that He's making. He means that our allegiance and love for Him must be so great, that by comparison our love for our families and even for our own lives looks like hatred.

Normally, there's no conflict between loving Christ and our family members also. Sometimes though a tug of war develops, where a family member puts pressure on us to back off from or even abandon our love for Christ. In those difficult situations, we don't love either Christ or the family member if we accede to the pressure. We don't love the family member, because if we bow to the pressure, we're saying that Christ is not worthy of being followed above all others, and we keep the family member from seriously considering the claims of Christ. We do not love Christ because we've put a sinful human being, who didn't give himself or our sins, in a higher place than the spotless Lamb of God who freely offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

The late Christian philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, whose life and books have impacted tens of thousands for Christ, was raised in a non-Christian home. After he became a Christian, his father didn't want him to go to college and didn't want him to become a minister, which young Fran felt called to be. When the moment finally came where he had to make the decision to go with what he thought God wanted or to submit to his father's wishes, Fran asked in a strained voice, "Pop, give me a few minutes to go down in the cellar and pray." In fear and uncertainty, he went down there and wept hot tears of sorrow for his father.

Then, in an act of desperate and simple faith, he did something that he'd never advise anyone else to do, but what he felt was right for him at the time. He prayed, "Oh, God, please show me." Then, he took out a coin and said, "Heads, I'll go in spite of dad's desires." It was heads. Still weeping, he cried out, "God, be patient with me. If it's tails this time, I'll go." Tails. The third time he pleaded, "Once more, God. I don't want to make a mistake with Dad upstairs. Please now, let it be heads again." It was heads. So he went upstairs and told his dad that he had to go.

His dad looked hard at him then went out to slam the door. But just before the door hit the frame, his voice came through, "I'll pay for the first half year." It was many years later that Francis Schaeffer's dad became a Christian, but Francis Schaeffer thinks that this moment was the basis of his salvation, when he in effect declared, "I must follow the Lord."

Some of you, if you're seeking to be obedient to the Lord with your finances, are going to have conflicts in your marriage. How should you handle that? I'd encourage you to appeal to your spouse in a gracious, Christ-like manner. I'd also demonstrate to them how serious you are.

For example, if I were negotiating with Jane about wanting to give more, I'd say, "Jane, I'd like to give more. I'll go without buying books so we can." If you're an avid deer hunter and you tell your spouse that you're willing to skip deer hunting to give more, you're going to have their attention. A wife might say, "I'll go without new clothes or

some new piece of furniture.” You’re communicating to your spouse that following Jesus is more important to you than your relationship with anyone on this earth. That’s the clear application of verse 26.

When Jesus says we must hate even our own lives, He means in comparison with our love for Him. Normally, when we follow Christ He lovingly gives us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4). He floods us with joy and true pleasure (Ps. 16:11). But, there are times when it’s easy to give in to the gratification of the flesh and it’s hard to obey Christ. A disciple has thought this through in advance and is committed to following Christ.

2) We must carry our own cross (14:27). The cross wasn’t an implement of irritation or inconvenience. The cross was an implement of slow, tortuous death. Jesus is looking at the process of daily death to selfish desires and of the willingness to bear reproach for His name’s sake. Since our Savior suffered the rejection and agony of the cross, if we follow after Him, we must be prepared for the same treatment. Again, this is a process in which we all must grow. If we blow it, we must confess it to the Lord and seek to be obedient the next time we have opportunity to suffer for Him. But if we aren’t involved in the process of carrying our own cross in death to self, we’re not on the path of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

3) We must give up all our possessions (14:33). After telling the two parables about considering the cost before making a commitment, Jesus concludes, *“So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions”* (NASV). Does Jesus mean this literally, that we must get rid of everything we own and take a vow of poverty in order to be a Christian? No. So what does He mean?

Jesus is getting at the fact that there are two possible lords that we can serve and the two are mutually exclusive: God or the material things of this world. Most of us think we can combine them, with God taking the lead: “I’ll serve God mostly, but I’d also like to serve money.” Jesus says that won’t work: *“You cannot serve God and money”* (Luke 16:13). In other words, you can’t just add Jesus to your already materialistic lifestyle as a way of rounding out your spiritual needs. To be a Christian means you’ve been bought with a price and you’re not your own (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Nothing you own is your own. You become the slave of Jesus Christ and He owns everything. Jesus isn’t just Lord of a tenth; He’s Lord of all. We’re just managers of it for Him. Of course, in return we gain all the riches of heaven for all eternity. But, still, we need to sit down and determine if we’re willing to follow Jesus as Lord of everything from our families, to our possessions, to our very lives.

b. There is a bottom line of not following Jesus. If we make a profession of following Christ, but then go back on our commitment, people will ridicule us as they’d mock a man who started to build a tower but couldn’t complete it: “He claimed that he became a Christian, but look at him now! Some Christian he is!” Or, we’ll face the damaging effects of being defeated by the enemy because we didn’t consider the intensity of the battle we’re facing. Satan loves it when a Christian’s testimony is damaged because he didn’t consider the demands of following Christ in this evil world. Finally, Jesus uses a third illustration to show the cost of not following Him, that of salt that’s become tasteless. The salt in Jesus’ day was often corrupted with other substances. If moisture hit the salt, it’d evaporate and leave behind these other impure minerals, so that the salt lost its saltiness. It was worthless for any useful purpose and

had to be thrown away. Jesus is saying that if a follower of His doesn't live as he ought to live, he's useless to God. Whether Jesus is referring to a false believer being judged or to a true believer being taken out of this life because of his sin is ambiguous. Either way, I don't want that to happen to me, do you? The point is, follow Jesus by putting Him above everything else in life so that you're useful to God. That's the last thing we must briefly consider...

3. The bottom line is that if we're truly following Jesus, we must put Him above everything else in life. Jesus clearly asserts His absolute supremacy and authority in these verses! What other person could rightly claim that everyone must hate their closest family members in comparison to their love for Him? Jesus could do it because He's God! What man could tell people to give up all their possessions for His sake? Some cults require that of their followers and we rightly label them as false. But Jesus could do so with authority because He's the Lord. He alone deserves to be first above everything else in all of our lives because He's the Lord God who willingly offered Himself on the cross for our sins!

Conclusion: Jesus' words here are tough and sobering! We all fall short, but we must honestly work at applying them to our hearts. So is there any relationship that comes ahead of Christ in your life? If He's first, then obviously you'll be spending consistent time alone with Him in His Word, in prayer, and in devotion. You'll be fellowshiping with Him each day. You won't allow any other relationship to draw you away from obedience to Him. You'll confess and forsake every sin that hinders fellowship with Him. If you don't hate your own life and daily carry your cross, you're not His disciple.

Is Jesus Lord of your finances and possessions? Are you faithful in managing these things for His purposes? Do you give generously and faithfully to His work? Or, is the love of money; are the things of this world choking out the Word in your life? Do you really love Jesus? The fact is that you can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

Salvation is absolutely free, but once you receive it, it costs you everything. To truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else. *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

What's the Bottom Line? We must count the cost.

Recently, I read *Onward* by Howard Schultz, the founder and CEO of Starbucks. He shares the Starbucks' story of how when the economy tanked in 2008, Starbucks almost died like a lot of other companies. It's the account of their journey back to profitability. Let me read a portion to you:

"How many people are you bringing?" "Ten thousand." Even through the phone our manager could see people's stunned expressions. Months before we arrived in New Orleans, our team had contacted several nonprofit community organizations to let them know Starbucks' leadership conference was coming to their city and our people wanted to help. Although the groups were grateful, it quickly became clear that they simply had no precedent for hosting thousands of volunteers all at once. They didn't have enough supervisors. They didn't have enough shovels. So in addition to bodies, we bought our own shovels and hammers and other supplies, \$1 million worth, enough to fill two rental trucks."

Here's what's going on. While Starbucks was in bad financial shape and is just barely on its way to a comeback – they choose to hold their annual meeting of baristas and

managers in New Orleans – because they want to help one of the most devastated cities in our country. This wasn't a company that had bucks to spare or money to throw around. Yet, for four days, Monday through Thursday of that week, 2000 Starbucks' partners joined up with some of the organizations rebuilding New Orleans. They gave five hours each day to do whatever needed to be done in the midst of their annual business conference on what they themselves needed to do just to survive. They rebuilt parks, painted a high school stadium, installed fencing, cleaned out storm drains, repaired public schools. And when they were finished with a project, if they got done early, they asked for more and more they got! A small army of volunteers from a company that was suffering invaded New Orleans to help out those worse off than they were.

The conference ended and Starbucks partners packed their bags and headed home. Craig Russell, the Starbucks executive, who'd been responsible for organizing the week, stayed one more day to relax and recoup. As he walked through New Orleans' famed French Quarter, he stopped at the booth of a young street vendor to admire the art. "Where are you from?" the artist asked. "Seattle," Craig responded. "Did you have anything to do with Starbucks being here?" When Craig answered yes, the young man got choked up. "You paid my mortgage this month."

As I read that Starbucks story, I thought, "if a secular business can do that...can give so much...what about us? What about me?" I believe with all my heart that we, Grace Church, is on the brink of making a difference for the cause of Christ in this community, in this time, in this place – that most of us have never dreamed of. **What's the Bottom Line?**

1. We must pray and dream big. Chuck Swindoll tells of a cartoon of two Eskimos sitting on chairs, fishing through holes in the ice. The Eskimo on the right has dropped his line through your typical disk-like opening, about the size of a small manhole. But the other Eskimo has his line in the water, too. He also waits calmly for a nibble. But his hole in the ice is more like a crater, a Rose Bowl-sized opening that reaches to the horizon—in the shape of a whale. He was dreaming big.

Since we started this journey, looking at our land, I've dreamed, pictured, with the slope of our land, of having a basement in our new building. It just makes sense to do that on that site. It also sets up the next phase for our next project...relatively inexpensively. But it's going to mean that we need to move past our goal of \$300,000.00 to double what's already been committed. I know we can do it. That brings me to my second point.

2. We must each give big. I'm so proud of our leaders. They've committed big. If I died and went to heaven today, I'd be a happy man. I have the privilege of pastoring champions.

When Jane and I first heard what the project was going to cost and going to take, we determined we were going to give big. We're hitting up our retirement for a greater retirement plan, one that's out of this world. I don't want anyone else to go into a Christless eternity on my watch.

A few months ago our van with 210,000 miles gave up the ghost. It wasn't worth it to fix it. That's Jane's car so now she and I are down to one vehicle. Jane and I decided that while it's easier if we both have a car and a lot more convenient, this new building is more important. So rather than rush out to get another car, we're holding back. We'll probably eventually get one but not as fast, because the cause of reaching this

community for Jesus is too big. Sure it's a hassle. It's not convenient but we rejoice that we're able to do it. And I don't think it's really sacrificial, not really. I don't think I know, compared to my brothers and sisters around the globe in places like Iran or Miramar what sacrifice is.

Now you know when you decide to honor the Lord, everything gets better and blessings start pouring down from heaven. That's not what usually happens. When you step up for Jesus, Satan puts you in his crosshairs.

This past Wednesday, our son, Aaron, drove up to see some friends in the Twin Cities. Around 11 pm, we get a call. It's Aaron. He hit a deer. His car is totaled. So now we're not just down one car, we're down two cars.

But Jane and I believe that this is important for the cause of Christ and the future of our church's ministry in this community. So by God's grace, we're committed to giving big. Even if it means a smaller retirement, even if it means being inconvenienced.

Our leaders have stepped up. They've helped us pass that \$200,000.00 mark. But we've got a ways to go.

Jane and I are all in. We can't do it without you. Will you join us? Will you partner with us? We can do this...let's do it!