

Terms of Discipleship

by Roy Sommerville

Following Christ is a long obedience in the same direction, requiring a commitment to die to whatever is holding you back and to choose between Christ and someone you love.

Duration: 34:51

Scripture: Luke 14:25

Topics: "Discipleship", "Commitment to Christ"

Description

Roy Sommerville emphasizes the true cost of discipleship in his sermon 'Terms of Discipleship,' explaining that while many are drawn to Christ for various reasons such as peace, comfort, and purpose, these motivations are insufficient for enduring faith. He highlights that true discipleship requires a radical commitment, including prioritizing love for Christ above all else, even family, and being willing to bear one's cross, which symbolizes a complete surrender to Christ's will. Sommerville warns that understanding the terms of discipleship is crucial to avoid falling away when challenges arise, as true followers must be prepared to let go of anything that hinders their relationship with Christ. He encourages listeners to reflect on what may be holding them back from fully committing to Christ and to take actionable steps towards obedience and faithfulness.

Transcript

Just a refreshing time of worship in the Lord's presence this morning. Just a little housekeeping item before we get into the message this morning. I need to read the wedding bands for the third time.

This is to announce that Ashley Maharaj and Sean Oppenheimer plan to get married next Saturday, November the 16th, 2013. And if anyone has any reason why they should not get married, please put that in writing and let me know. And Sean and Ashley, you will be relieved to know that so far no one has objected, so that's a very good thing.

People become Christians for many different reasons. Some people are restless and they are attracted by Christ's offer of inner peace. Some people are hurting and they are compelled by Christ's offer of comfort and hope, strength.

Some people fear death and find strength in Christ's offer of eternal life. Some want to make a difference and have a sense of purpose, and they are attracted by Christ's bold command to go into all of the world and make disciples. Some are unsatisfied with life and thirsty at a soul level, and they are attracted by

Jesus' offer of living water to quench a thirsty soul, and they're attracted by Jesus' offer of love and joy and satisfaction with this refreshing living water.

Some people are burdened by guilt and memories of failure and bad choices, and then they are attracted by Jesus' offer of forgiveness and grace. They are all good reasons for coming to Christ, all biblical reasons for coming to Christ, but they are not good reasons for staying with Christ. Following Christ is simple.

Saint said it. Follow me. Simple, but it's not easy.

Discipleship is not simply a decision. It's a direction. It's a long obedience in the same direction.

You need to know what you're getting into with Christ before you become a Christian. You need to know the terms and the conditions of becoming a Christian and what it means to follow Christ before you make the decision to follow Christ. Salvation is free, but discipleship is, quite frankly, going to cost you everything.

So, I want to show you this morning what you're signing up for when you become a Christian. I want to show you the terms of following Christ and the clearest description of discipleship found anywhere in Scripture. Luke chapter 14, verses 25 to 33.

Probably the most difficult passage in the entire Bible to come to grips with and to live out. Here's what you can reasonably expect as a follower of Jesus Christ. To fail to understand this, to fail to expect this, runs a grave risk of your spiritual faith blowing up.

So, here it is, Luke chapter 14, 25 to 33, and there's a little outline in your bulletin you can follow along. We probably won't finish this this morning, but we should be able to get through about the first five, and then we'll finish it up next week. We'll start with a real easy one.

Look at verse 25, Luke 14. Now, great crowds accompanied Jesus. Great crowds accompanied him.

So, here's the first observation. Disciples of Christ will be amazed. This is an easy one.

Jesus was the most popular person in all Israel for at least a while. When people met Jesus, they were amazed. When Jesus taught, people were astonished because he taught like no one had ever taught before.

Children loved Jesus. What Jesus freely offered was amazing. That's why verse 25 says, great crowds accompanied him.

Here's some of the reasons why I was drawn to Christ as a young guy, fresh off the boat in Canada at 20 years of age. Jesus said, I will give you an inner peace that the world knows nothing of. Jesus offered love.

Jesus said, as I have loved you, love one another. Jesus offered joy. He said, my joy will be in you and your joy will be full.

Jesus offers eternal life. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will never die.

Jesus offers fruit. He says, you will bear enduring fruit that will contribute to the lives of many other people. Jesus offered meaningful life.

He said, I have come that you might have life and have it to the full. Jesus offered satisfaction. He said, anybody with a thirsty, restless soul, I'll give you living water that'll quench and refresh and satisfy you at a soul level.

Jesus offered rest. He said, come on to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I'll give you rest. Jesus offered forgiveness.

He said, the father will forgive you if you ask him. Jesus offers freedom from sin that has a pythonic grip on your life. Jesus said, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

That's why great crowds accompanied Jesus. That's why great crowds followed Jesus. They were amazed.

And when you follow Jesus, you can fully expect to be astonished and astounded and amazed. And those are all wonderful reasons for coming to Christ. But none of them are enough to keep you with Christ.

They won't keep you. None of these will keep you when life gets tough. If you do not have some understanding of what to expect.

Here's where it gets sticky. Look at verse 25. He turned and he said to them, this is the crowds.

So this teaching is not just for the insider group of 12 disciples. This is this is teaching given to the masses. Here's what he says.

Stunning. If anybody comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, he cannot be my disciple. Wow.

You have to hate the people you love the most. Parents, spouse, children, siblings. That does not sound very much like come to Jesus and Jesus will make you happy, healthy and rich.

Now let's clarify something here. This does not mean what it sounds like. Words mean different things in different cultures.

For example, if you know nothing about the computer culture, you may be surprised to know that the word start in computer culture means stop. You want to turn your computer off, you press start. That's a very different meaning of the word if you don't know anything about the computer culture.

In the world of teenagers, bad means good. In the world of the teenagers, sick means very good. In the Hebrew culture, the word hate in this context meant to love somebody less than somebody else.

In the Hebrew culture, this was known as exaggeration or hyperbole. Exaggerating something to make a point. Love for Jesus.

Jesus is saying love for me must so far exceed love for anybody else. The love that you have for the most precious people in your life must seem like hatred by comparison. That's what it means.

Matthew chapter 10, 37 says exactly the same thing except without the hyperbole. Here's what Matthew says. Anybody who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Anybody who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Here's the point. Disciples of Christ may one day have to choose between Christ and someone you love.

There may be times when you will have to choose Christ over the people you love the most. In fact, Christ may become the cause of division in some of your families. Matthew 10, 34 to 37, Jesus says this.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace, but a sword of relational division. For I have not come, for I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a person's enemies will be those of his own household. That's what is going to happen in some people's lives when they claim to follow Christ.

When you become a Christian, you may create enemies from within your own family. A good friend of mine, when he came to Christ, went home and told his parents. And his parents told him, you're going to follow Christ, don't come back to this house.

It happens all the time. This does not happen in every family. This did not happen in my family.

When I came to Christ at 20 years of age, my family was delighted. When my kids professed Christ, we were delighted. That does not happen in every family, but it does happen in some families, especially in families where a family member comes to Christ late in the game.

A wife resents a husband who finds Christ. A parent resents a child who comes to Christ. A lifelong friend resents a friend who finds Christ.

A child resents a parent who honors Christ and tries to enforce a Christ-honoring climate in the home. You may have to choose between Christ and someone you love. And it's very important, Jesus says this, to the mass crowd right up front, so that they will know what they're getting into if they decide to follow Christ.

This is the reason why so many fall away from Christ, because they come to Christ for insufficient reasons. Number three, disciples of Christ sometimes have to choose between honoring Christ and serving self. Look what Jesus says, if anybody comes after me and does not hate father, mother, brother, sister, and then look what it says at the end of that, and does not hate even his own life.

So you know right there that the word hate does not mean hate in the traditional sense of the word. You have to understand it in this context, because Jesus elsewhere says the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as who? Yourself. So clearly the word hate here cannot mean hate yourself in the traditional understanding of the word.

It's hyperbole. It's exaggeration. It's love for Christ must so exceed your self-serving interest for yourself that it looks like hatred.

It's all about exalting him over me. We exalt Christ the way the donkey exalted Christ when he carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Can you imagine when the donkey heard all of the cheering and all of the worship and all of the praise from the crowds, if that donkey had thought to himself, oh they're all worshipping me.

What silliness. It's not about me. It's all about him.

It's all about loving him and worshipping him. John the Baptist had it right on. I'm not worthy to untie the buckles of his sandals.

He must increase. I must decrease. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul said, Jesus died so that we would no longer live for ourselves.

Philippians 2, 3, and 4 says the same thing. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility count other people more significant than yourself. Somebody said the word joy comes when you put Jesus first, others second, and yourself last.

That's good. When you come to Jesus, pride has to go. It just cannot coexist with following Jesus.

Sometimes I'm so concerned about winning the argument or getting the credit or getting my fair share or defending my rights or protecting my reputation or demanding respect. Perhaps when you're despised and you're getting no respect, you've got more identification with Christ than at any other time because he, Psalm 53, was despised and rejected. We hate to be humbled.

Worse, we hate to be humiliated. But perhaps it's only through being humbled and humiliated that we experience true humility. Humility shines brightest against the backdrop of being humbled or even humiliated.

Humility is the ability to not defend, to not fight back, to not strike when we've been humbled and humiliated. Jesus says, you want to follow me? You have to choose to exalt Christ and humble ourselves. Number four, disciples of Christ need to do away with anything that holds them back.

Look at verse 27. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Matthew 10, verse 39, Jesus says the exact same thing.

Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Mark 8, 34 says the same thing. If anybody would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Then look, 9, 23, he says the same thing again. If anybody would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. What's with all the repetitious cross statements? A cross was a first century symbol of death.

A man on a cross was a very, very common sight back then. They estimate that about 35,000 crucifixions happened during the New Testament era. Every one of those crucifixions was public.

Crosses were erected on major thoroughfares and on intersections so that every man, woman, and child knew what a cross was. Every man, woman, and child had seen victims hanging on a cross. Every man, woman, and child probably saw a crucifixion victim dragging their cross through the narrow streets of the city.

So every single man, woman, and child, when Jesus said the word cross, they instantly thought death. So an invitation to take up one's cross meant come and die. But what's that mean? Does it mean physical death? Does it mean anybody who follows me is going to die physically because they follow me? For some, it did mean that.

In fact, for some, it still does mean that today. Many of the early believers, starting with Stephen, he was the first martyr in Acts chapter 8, died for Christ, a martyr's death. We prayed last Sunday night for the persecuted church.

There are countless numbers of Christians who are shedding their blood today because they named the name of Christ. For them, Jesus' words are literal. Anybody who wants to follow me, take up your cross.

You're going to die because of your faith in Christ. But for us living in North America, at this point in time, it does not mean that. There are not many Christians in North America who are dying as a direct result of their faith in Christ.

May happen, but it's very, very rare. So what does that mean for the rest of us? The likelihood is, the odds are, you'll be relieved to know that most of you will never face that decision of having to die physically because of your faith in Christ. The only death you might experience is death of embarrassment.

You hear the expression, I died of embarrassment. Well, maybe that might happen to you. But what does this mean for us? Notice, taking up your cross is in direct relation to following Christ.

You cannot understand what it means to take up your cross and die without understanding it in relation to following Jesus. Here's what it means. You have to die to whatever it is that's holding you back from following Christ, because you cannot follow Christ if you have not died to that which is holding you back from following Christ.

Try to follow Christ. Trying to follow Christ while burdened by hindrances that are holding you back from following Christ is like trying to push a car with a handbrake on and with the transmission in park. Or it's like trying to run the hundred meter sprint in a potato sack.

You just can't do it. Hebrews 12.1 says, throw off the weights and the sin that entangle you. Get rid of them.

Say no to them. Die to them. That's what it means to pick up your cross.

Three things were true of every person who carried a cross. Number one, they never came back. Nobody ever survived crucifixion.

Any mother who watched her son carrying a cross down those narrow city streets knew that he was never coming back. Following Christ is a permanent, lifelong commitment. It's a long obedience in the same direction.

Just like the song says, no turning back, no turning back. Remember, he turned and he said this to the crowd, to the masses. This was not insider training just to the 12.

This was a mass teaching to the crowds. He said, if you're thinking about following me, know this before you start. There's no trap door.

There's no turning back. There's a very serious passage in Hebrews chapter six that is the subject of some controversy. Let me just read it for you and I'm just going to let it stand for itself.

I'm not going to try to interpret it for you. Listen to what it says, Hebrews six verse four. For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened.

Many scholars believe that's describing people who have claimed to know Jesus Christ, who have tasted the heavenly gift, again same thing, and have shared in the Holy Spirit. Sounds like a Christian, doesn't it? And have tasted the goodness of the word of God. Sounds like somebody who's come to church and

they've heard the Bible, heard the gospel.

And the powers of the age to come, they've actually experienced something of the power of Christ in their life. But then they fall away. It is impossible to restore them again to repentance.

Since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. Serious words. Jesus said, when anybody follows me, nobody ever comes back from a crucifixion.

Second thing that was true of every crucifixion victim was this. Nothing else mattered once they were on that cross. The cross was all-consuming.

Any worries and fears and petty offenses and challenges all faded away in the pain of the cross. And so it is when we take up the cross of Christ, he becomes our all-consuming passion. We are not consumers who come to Christ for what we can get.

We are to be consumed by Christ. Like the old song says, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory. And grace.

Third thing about a cross is this. A crucifixion victim faces forward. A crucifixion victim faces only one direction.

He most certainly cannot look back and he does not look from side to side, only forward. There are no distractions for a crucifixion victim. The apostle Paul was like that.

He said, I preach Christ crucified. The older I get, that's my heart. The older I get, I want nothing more than to be consumed with Christ.

The crucifixion victim leaves everything behind that's a hindrance. You would never have seen a crucifixion victim with a cross over one shoulder and a suitcase under the other. Taking up your cross meant to let go of whatever is holding you back.

There's a guy I read just this week preparing for this message. Guy was an intern at a TV station and he was a follower of Christ. He was given a promotion from on-ped intern into a regular 40 hour a week job.

His job was to monitor the stations during the night. There was 45 stations that he had to monitor. One of them was an adult entertainment station.

He turned down the job because as a follower of Jesus Christ, he could not subject his mind to looking at pornography. The boss really liked him and tried to find a way to make it work, but they could find a way through it. He lost the job, the promotion, and he also lost the internship.

Six months later, he still hadn't found work. In his testimony, he quoted Jeremiah 29 verse 10 and 11. Jeremiah 29 says this, I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.

Plans for your well-being, not for evil. I'm going to give you a future and a hope. You will call upon me and come and pray and I will hear you.

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart and I will be found by you, declares the Lord. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from the nations and all the places where I've driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. This

young man in his testimony said, I've been out of work now for six months.

I've tried many interviews and none of them have worked out, but this text has been my strength these past six months. And then he drew our attention to verse 10. For thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill my promise.

This young man pointed out that God's promises do not get fulfilled in an instant. They often do not get fulfilled in a day. And we have such short attention spans and we are so impatient.

God looks at our lives over the totality of our lives. We look at our lives between today and tomorrow. It's not a case of God has been faithful to me.

It's a case of God, what have you done for me lately? And Jesus is saying, you need to let go of whatever's holding you back. So what's the next step of obedience for you in following Christ? Maybe you're here today and you've never made a commitment to Christ before. What's holding you back? Fear, doubts, pride, unbelief, stubbornness, selfishness? You don't want someone else being an authority over your life? Jesus is calling you to let it go.

You need to let it go. You need to die to that. There's a baptism service tonight.

Maybe you know Christ and you need to be baptized. What's holding you back? You need to let it go. Whatever it is that's holding you back.

San just said this morning, I was so scared to have to stand in front of people. You know what? She died to that yesterday morning. She just put that to death.

She said, I'm going to die to that. That's not going to hold me back any longer. And I'm going to get baptized.

You know, you can get three people being baptized tonight. You've got about six hours between now and tonight where you could make that decision. You just need to give me a call.

I would be delighted to talk to you to make sure you understand what baptism is. And I would be delighted to baptize you tonight. Maybe Christ is talking to you this morning about holiness and purity.

What's holding you back from living a life of purity? You need to let it go, whatever it is. Stop letting it control you. You need to die to it.

Maybe you're struggling with some demons, some addictions, and they've got a pythonic grip on your life and they're affecting your relationships and your work and your health. And you need to make up your mind. Today's the day.

You're going to get help and you're going to let it go. You cannot follow Christ if you do not die to the stuff that's holding you back from following Christ. Christ is calling you to witness, but you're held back by fear and inertia.

You stopped doing it so long ago that you've built up a bundle of excuses and rationale why you don't need to do it anymore. You've even got wrong beliefs and interpretations about the Bible that are fueling your belief that you don't need to do it anymore. You need to die to all of that stuff that you can't follow.

Angela gave a little testimony a couple of weeks about standing up in her staff meeting and telling eight other people that she worked with, including the boss, that she was a follower of Jesus Christ. She named the name of Christ and He was the most important person in her life. And she was telling me beforehand, and in fact I think she even told you that morning, that she was really, really scared.

But she died to that fear. And she said, well, Jesus wants me to do it. I need to do it.

You cannot follow Christ if you do not die to the stuff that's holding you back. Why do we need to do this? Why should anybody follow Christ? I said at the beginning that you cannot follow Christ for consumer reasons. You cannot follow Christ because of all the positive things that you get when you get Jesus.

Because if that's the only reason for coming to Christ, then when life gets tough, you're going to cave in. There's only one biblical reason for following Christ, and it is because what the Bible says about Him is true. That's it.

If you're not sure that it's true, you cannot follow Him. But once you settle that it's all true, that everything I've just told you this morning is all true, you really have no choice but to bow the knee and surrender to Him. C. T. Studd, the great English cricketer, said, I've settled that it's all true.

Jesus Christ is God and died for me. Therefore, there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for Him. Thirty-odd years ago at the back of People's Church was the end of my six-month journey struggling with whether it was all true.

The moment I settled that it was true, I was in all the way, whatever the cost. Tony, come and lead us through a time of communion. Please take your places in the front.

One quote that is often used on Remembrance Day is from Sir Winston Churchill, who was a Prime Minister of Britain during World War II.

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