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# Radical Obedience and the Cost of Discipleship

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KEY VERSE

*“So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” (Luke 14:33)*

READINGS

Genesis22:1–14; Psalm 119:1-16; Revelation14:1-5; Luke 14:25-33

## Introduction

The Christian journey is not one of convenience but of conviction. Following Christ is not a comfortable stroll but a costly commitment. In today’s world, where comfort, prosperity, and personal autonomy are glorified, Jesus’ call to radical obedience and discipleship comes as a countercultural challenge. The readings today remind us that genuine discipleship demands full surrender, obedience in faith, moral integrity, and spiritual focus. From Abraham’s obedience to God’s unfathomable command, to the psalmist’s love for God’s law, to the vision of the redeemed in Revelation, and finally to Jesus’ own words about the cost of following Him, we are invited to examine what it truly means to walk the path of discipleship. Let us explore four key aspects of radical obedience and discipleship based on today’s lectionary readings.

## A Heart Aligned with God’s Word (Psalm 119:1–16)

The Psalmist begins with a declaration: “Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord” (v.1). Radical obedience begins with a deep love for God’s Word. In a world full of distractions and moral ambiguity, the Word of God becomes our compass. The psalmist confesses, “I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you” (v.11). Today, we are bombarded with philosophies and lifestyles that conflict with God’s truth. Yet, as disciples, our commitment must be to internalize the Word, letting it shape our thoughts, values, and actions. This heart-anchoring in Scripture does not just inform us but transforms us. Radical obedience is not a reluctant submission but a joyful devotion to God’s commands.

A young Christian working in a corporate setting was ridiculed for not manipulating numbers. When asked why he wouldn’t compromise, he replied, “Because the Word of God is my first rule.” His obedience made him unpopular but gave him deep peace.

## Trusting and Obeying Even When It Hurts (Genesis 22:1–14)

The story of Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac is one of the most startling illustrations of radical obedience in the Bible. Abraham is called to surrender not just his beloved son but his future, his hope, and the promise of God. Yet, without questioning, he obeys. This kind of obedience is costly. Radical obedience does not always make logical sense, but it reflects deep trust in God’s character. Abraham names the place “The Lord will provide” (v.14), showing that obedience opens the door to divine provision. In our lives, we may be asked to give up relationships, careers, ambitions, or comforts for the sake of Christ. Like Abraham, we must walk up the mountain of surrender, trusting that God sees and provides.

A missionary couple left a lucrative job and comfortable life in the West to serve in a tribal village. When asked why, they said, “Because God asked us to go. That’s enough.” Years later, that village now has a church and school, and lives have been transformed.

## Marked by Purity and Loyalty (Revelation 14:1–5)

The vision in Revelation presents a group standing with the Lamb, marked on their foreheads, singing a new song. These are those who have not defiled themselves, who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. This symbolic passage highlights purity, loyalty, and spiritual integrity. Discipleship in today’s age calls us to resist corruption, compromise, and worldly seduction. We are to live as those marked by Christ – identifiable not just by our words but by our lives. Radical obedience means choosing the narrow road of integrity when others take shortcuts. In a country hostile to Christianity, a young girl was arrested for owning a Bible. When told she would be released if she renounced Jesus, she replied, “I cannot deny the One who died for me.” Her faith inspired many to follow Christ.

## Following Christ with Total Surrender (Luke 14:25–33)

In the Gospel reading, Jesus gives a sobering description of discipleship: “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (v.27). He speaks of hating family, carrying the cross, and giving up possessions – not as literal commands to hate but as hyperbolic expressions emphasizing total allegiance. Jesus wants us to count the cost. Half-hearted discipleship is not acceptable in the Kingdom of God. We are called to follow Him even if it means suffering, sacrifice, and surrender. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who opposed Hitler and was executed for his faith, wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Radical obedience cost him his life, but his witness lives on.

## The Discipleship of Jesus Christ: A Call to Total Commitment

Discipleship, as taught by Jesus Christ, is not merely a status but a dynamic, lifelong journey of following, learning, growing, and bearing fruit in Him. It is a call not just to believe in Him but to become like Him. At the heart of Jesus’ teaching on discipleship is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), where He declares, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations… teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Here, discipleship is not optional for Christians; it is the core mission of the Church. It involves going, baptizing, teaching, and forming obedient followers of Christ who carry forward His message and presence in the world. In John 15:4–7, Jesus speaks of a vital aspect of discipleship – abiding in Him. He says, “Abide in me, and I in you… whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” A disciple is not just someone who follows Christ externally but one who remains deeply connected with Him, drawing life, wisdom, strength, and purpose from the Vine. Without this abiding relationship, discipleship loses its essence and effectiveness.

Jesus also emphasizes the centrality of truth and obedience. In John 8:31–32, He teaches, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” True discipleship is marked by a growing hunger for God’s Word, not just for information but for transformation. It is through His Word that disciples understand God’s will and walk in the liberty of truth. However, discipleship is costly. In Luke 14:27–29, Jesus presents the radical nature of discipleship: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Following Jesus requires self-denial, sacrificial living, and a willingness to suffer for His sake. It

calls for counting the cost, renouncing all else, and placing Jesus above all relationships, possessions, and personal ambitions. This is not to discourage but to prepare disciples for the reality of kingdom living. Discipleship also means bearing fruit that reflects Christ's character. As seen in John 15, a disciple is known not by profession but by fruitfulness – love, service, obedience, and the making of more disciples. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) becomes the evidence of an abiding disciple. Thus, the qualities of a disciple of Jesus are: abiding in Christ, obedience to His Word, a life marked by truth, a willingness to suffer for Him, and a mission-oriented heart. Discipleship is the narrow road, but it leads to abundant life – a life aligned with God's purposes. In a world seeking comfort without commitment and belief without obedience, Jesus still calls, "Follow Me." May we respond with surrender and steadfastness, knowing that the cost of discipleship is great – but the reward is far greater.

## The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Prophetic Call to Authentic Faith

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic work "The Cost of Discipleship" stands as one of the most profound theological writings of the 20th century, calling Christians to a radical and authentic following of Jesus Christ. First published in 1937 in Nazi Germany under the title Nachfolge ("Discipleship"), the book emerged in a time of moral crisis and spiritual compromise in the German church. As Adolf Hitler's regime sought to co-opt Christianity into its nationalist ideology, Bonhoeffer stood firm against the distortion of the gospel, offering a prophetic critique not only of the state but of a complacent and compromised Christianity. Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, theologian, and key member of the Confessing Church, believed that the Church had become too comfortable with a grace that demanded nothing – what he famously termed "cheap grace." His book challenged Christians to rediscover the true call of Jesus: a costly, cross-bearing discipleship that might lead to suffering, loss, and even death – as it did for Bonhoeffer himself, who was executed by the Nazis in 1945 for his involvement in a plot to overthrow Hitler.

At the heart of The Cost of Discipleship is the contrast between cheap grace and costly grace. "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves… grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ." Cheap grace, for Bonhoeffer, is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession. It is grace that seeks to affirm the sinner without confronting sin, offering comfort without transformation. It trivializes the death of Christ by removing the call to follow Him in obedience and suffering. "Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again… It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life." Costly grace calls believers to follow Jesus in complete surrender. It demands obedience and transformation, and yet it is the only grace that truly saves – because it is the grace that calls us into union with the crucified and risen Lord. This grace is not earned but neither is it passive; it is a gift that compels a radical response.

Bonhoeffer draws heavily from the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Jesus, especially Luke 9:23 and Luke 14:27, where Jesus invites His followers to take up their cross. He insists that discipleship means following Jesus here and now – not in theory or sentiment, but in costly decisions and real-life obedience. Even today, The Cost of Discipleship remains a prophetic word to the Church. In a world of diluted theology, cultural Christianity, and consumer spirituality, Bonhoeffer calls us back to the original path of the gospel – to follow Jesus not only as Savior, but also as Lord. His life and death gave credibility to his message: true discipleship will cost us something – perhaps everything – but it is the only way to find real life in Christ.

## Conclusion

Radical obedience is not easy, but it is worth it. It begins with a heart rooted in God's Word, trusts God even in sacrifice, maintains purity and loyalty in a corrupt world, and follows Christ with total surrender. In a world that prizes self-preservation and convenience, Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow Him. The cost may be high, but the reward is greater – intimacy with Christ, purpose in life, and eternal joy. May we, as individuals and as a Church, choose this narrow but glorious path of discipleship, echoing the words of the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

## Prayer

Gracious and loving God, We thank You for the call to follow You – not in words alone, but in radical obedience and surrendered lives. Teach us to treasure Your Word, to trust You when obedience costs us dearly, to remain pure in a polluted world, and to follow Christ without hesitation. Give us courage, faith, and perseverance as we walk the path of discipleship. May our lives bear witness to the power and love of the cross. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.