

# Establish a Framework

Cost-Benefit Analysis Series, November 12 & 13, 2022 | Luke 14:25-33

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Does asking about the costs and benefits of Christian faith feel wrong?

**The cost-benefit-analysis process is an orderly way to make a decision.**

Harvard Business School defines a Cost-Benefit Analysis as “the process of comparing the projected or estimated costs and benefits (or opportunities) associated with a project decision to determine whether it makes sense from a business perspective.”<sup>1</sup>

The cost-benefit-analysis process makes sense in many cases.

**I'm running a cost-benefit analysis on my Christmas cactus right now.**

I love Christmas cacti, particularly their blooms.

I've got a Christmas cactus I moved with me from Minnesota. It nearly died in the move but has recovered and grown beautiful again.

It puts out a few blooms each year but doesn't bloom spectacularly as some plants do.

There is a solution, a way to push them to bloom. In order to bloom, Christmas cacti require darkness for an extended period of time each day. So, if you want to force your Christmas cactus to bloom, move it into a closet for 10-12 uninterrupted hours of darkness a day. Then move it out during the day to get the light it needs to survive. Do this for 4-6 weeks, and your Christmas cactus will bloom beautifully.

I want my Christmas cactus to bloom, but is the cost of moving it into the dark each night for 10-12 hours and back again the next day worth the benefit of the lovely blooms?

I haven't decided. I'm still thinking. It's an informal little cost-benefit analysis I'm doing now.

**There are four “Steps of a Cost-Benefit Analysis”:**

1. Establish a Framework for Your Analysis This is where you identify the question you're asking. What are your goals and objectives? What does success look like?
2. Identify Your Costs and Benefits There are direct costs plus a number of indirect costs.
3. Assign a Value to Each Cost and Benefit
4. Tally the Total Value of Benefits and Costs and Compare

The cost-benefit analysis works in many decisions, particularly business decisions.

**It may seem wrong to do a cost-benefit analysis of Christian faith, but Jesus explicitly tells us to do so.**

Jesus calls men and women to become his disciples.

However, Jesus states explicitly in Luke 14 that deciding to do that involves costs.

He's implying that some people are unwilling or unable to pay those costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Stobierski, “How to Do a Cost-Benefit Analysis & Why It's Important,” <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/cost-benefit-analysis-on-2022-07-26>.

Consequently, Jesus says that it only makes sense to think about the costs, think about the benefits, weigh them against one another, and choose whether to have Christian faith or not.

Jesus tells us to do a cost-benefit analysis on the Christian faith.

### **So, today we are going to do step one in a cost-benefit analysis on the Christian faith.**

Step one is to establish a framework.

In step one, we identify the question we're asking. We get clarity on the goals and objectives involved in what we're considering and define what success looks like.

Today we're going to clarify the decision that Jesus requires us to make.

Jesus is requiring us to decide, so let's clarify what that decision is now.

### The decision Jesus requires us to make becomes clearer when we know the context.

#### **Jesus confronts the crowd following him in a surprisingly direct way in Luke 14:25-27:**

*Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "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."*

#### **Jesus' confrontational statements make sense when we know the context for his words.**

Earlier in Luke 14, we find Jesus at a Sabbath dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee.

The discussion turned to banquets, guest lists, pride, humility, and places of honor.

One guest proclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

Jesus responded by telling a parable about a man who gave a great banquet. The man sent out invitations and planned his guest list. When the time for the banquet came, the man sent out his servant to summon the guests to the banquet. One at a time, they declined. In anger, the man sent the servant out to summon everyone who would come—the poor, the blind, the sick. He wanted it (the banquet hall) filled. However, he closed the invitation to his original guests.

This is a complicated parable. In it, Jesus seems to be throwing wide open the doors of the kingdom of God. Everyone from everywhere is welcome!

But what does that mean? Is everyone really welcome? And on what terms?

Now, with dinner complete, Jesus is back on the road to Jerusalem, and he is surrounded by crowds of people expecting that they are all welcome just as they are.

#### **The tone of Jesus' confrontation makes sense when we know Jesus' relationship with the crowds.**

The crowds are filled with people who are considering Jesus. They're fascinated by him. They are looking for something from him. They're looking to be entertained, fed, and healed by him.

At the same time, they had very little commitment to Jesus. They were more interested in what Jesus could do for them than they were in what they would bring to Jesus.

Their loyalty could change in a second. Jesus knew all of this.

Consequently, Jesus was always suspicious of crowds.

As Jesus turned to the crowd in Luke 14:25 and following, he called for loyalty from them. The benefits of the kingdom of God are available to everyone, but there are costs. Jesus wants them to know.

### **Knowing the context and who is in the crowd clarifies the decision Jesus is requiring us to make.**

Jesus is addressing the crowd. He's not addressing a subset of his followers.

Jesus is addressing the crowd. He's addressing people who were fascinated by him, who were considering faith in him, and who had not yet made their final decision about him.

He's addressing the topic he raised earlier in Luke 14. Who is welcome in the kingdom of God? And if we're welcome in the kingdom of God, on what terms?

As he's addressing the outer rim of those even considering faith in him, he is addressing all of us who are inside. He's addressing us all. This teaching is for everyone.

The decision Jesus requires us to make becomes clearer when we know the context.

### **We have confused the decision Jesus requires us to make.**

#### **Some of us probably think, "Isn't Jesus just calling us to believe?"**

To us, what we believe is the critical question in Christian faith.

We remember that in **John 3:16** Jesus says,

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

There it is. Whoever **believes** in him avoids eternal death and gets eternal life.

Paul says something similar in **Romans 10:9**,

*... because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Paul adds that we confess our belief verbally, but it all starts with what we believe. Then we are saved. And being saved is what we really want.

We will explore what the word "believe" means in more detail in December.

For now, let's just say that when Jesus and Paul call us to believe, they don't mean that we have a check list of thoughts to think and that if we think those thoughts and agree with those truths, then we will be saved. The Bible is not calling us simply to agree to a list of thoughts.

James makes that clear in **James 2:19** which reads,

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

Believing—meaning knowing and agreeing with certain truths—is important.

Believing—in all the fullness we will explore in December—is what Jesus wants and expects.

But believing—meaning knowing and agreeing with certain truths—is not all that Jesus is asking.

#### **Others of us may think, "Isn't Jesus just calling us to follow him?"**

We're getting closer now. Jesus does call people to follow him. In **Mark 1:17** we read,

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."*

To follow Jesus implies that we obey him, we implement his teachings, and adopt a new ethics.

Yes, Jesus wants us to follow him. Following Jesus is a better way to think about what Jesus requires us to do, but that's not fully what Jesus is requiring us to consider here.

## **Is Jesus calling us all to be disciples?**

That's what Jesus is saying in Luke 14:25-27 and the verses that follow.

Look at **Luke 14:26** where Jesus says,

*"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."*

Then again in **Luke 14:27** Jesus says,

*"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."*

Finally, in **Luke 14:33** Jesus closes this section with,

*"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

Jesus' phrase "cannot be my disciple" reminds us that being his disciple is the issue.

Can we be Jesus' disciple? Jesus' message to the crowd, to everyone on the margins considering faith in him, and to everyone in the middle already gripped by Christian faith and trying to figure out what that means is, "Can you be my disciple?" That's the question.

## **We confuse the decision Jesus requires us to make by implicitly create different grades of Christians.**

We may not all say it out loud, but many of us think quietly that there are levels of Christians.

Let's say the grades or levels of Christians start at "Facebook Followers." "Facebook Followers" answer "yes" to questions like, "Do you believe in Jesus" but do nothing with that faith.

Then there are people who explicitly identify as "Christian." For some people, actually being a Christian means that we believe more things about Jesus and that those beliefs lead to some actions. Christians usually have a higher ethical code and may participate in more formal religious activities.

Above Christians, some of us think, are disciples, the people who take their faith seriously.

Then there are missionaries and pastors who are on mission.

We think we can choose the level that fits our willingness to commit.

I'm not saying that these categories are correct or that we even say these things out loud, but some of us think them, and that confuses us about the decision Jesus requires of us.

## **We differentiate terms that Jesus uses in strangely equivalent ways.**

Jesus doesn't call us to accept him at one point in life and to become a disciple at another.

There is no difference between accepting the call to get saved and the call to get serious.

There is one call—to accept Jesus as Savior AND as Lord.

To be saved AND to enter the kingdom of God,

To become a believer AND a Christian AND a disciple.

They are referring to one and the same thing. It's all one call.

## **Am I saying that salvation is not free?**

### **Jesus was addressing us all in Luke 14:28-33:**

*"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to*

*finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

We will get into the way these images work in future weeks.

In this passage, Jesus is asking us to consider whether or not we are willing and able to pay the price that being his disciple involves.

### **Am I suggesting that there is a hidden fee in the Christian faith?**

We all hate hidden costs, and airlines have been reminding us of that fact lately.

When you buy a ticket to fly on many airlines right now, that's just the beginning of the fees.

Of course, there are always taxes and airport fees tacked onto the price immediately.

Sometimes, if you want to choose where you will sit, then that involves another fee.

Aisle, window, and seats near the front of the plane cost more.

Seats with a little more leg room cost more.

Sometimes you have to pay to check a bag; sometimes you have to pay to carry on a bag.

By the time you actually fly, you may be paying twice the cost of the original flight for extras.

We don't like hidden fees. Am I implying that there are hidden fees in the Christian faith?

### **Let me reassure you that the Christian faith is free.**

Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that grace is a gift given to us freely through faith in Jesus. It says,

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

He also says in **Romans 3:23-24**,

*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...*

Jesus paid the price for our sin; we cannot pay that price ourselves.

Jesus offers us forgiveness by grace through faith as a gift; we cannot earn it.

Salvation is free.

### **However, notice the way Jesus' teaching implies a cost.**

In **Luke 14:26** Jesus says,

*"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."*

We will explore what that means in more detail next week. For this week, let's just say that Jesus is saying that we must value him more than anyone else.

Then again in **Luke 14:27** Jesus says,

*"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."*

Jesus expects us to lay down our lives.

Finally, in **Luke 14:33** Jesus closes with,

*"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

Jesus expects us to value him more than anything else!

These all imply a cost. How can something be both free and not free at the same time?

### **The Christian faith is free in the same way that my seminary education was free.**

I got a full scholarship to attend seminary. Someone else paid the price for me to go to graduate school to study to become a pastor.

In that same sense, being a disciple is free. Jesus paid the price so that we could follow him. He died on the cross to pay the price for our sin so that we could be forgiven, and he defeated death and rose again so that we could have eternal life. In that sense, being disciples is free.

But seminary also involved costs for me. I had to take three years out of my life to attend. I had to go to class. I had to do the reading, write the papers, and study. Seminary involved costs.

In the same way, being disciples involves costs.

So, it's all true. Being Jesus's disciples is free AND it involves costs.

### **Recognize the decision Jesus requires us to make.**

#### **We tend to confuse the decision Jesus sees as very clear.**

Jesus calls me to value him first before anyone else.

He calls me to take up my cross and lay down my life.

He calls me to put absolutely everything else second.

He calls me to be his disciple.

Being Jesus' disciple costs me nothing and everything all at the same time.

#### **Jesus asks all of us, "Can you be my disciple?"**

Jesus asks those who are not yet Christians, "Can you be my disciple?" If we are not Christians, then Jesus' call is for us to believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he is risen from the dead, and that he is Lord. His call is to follow him, to obey him, to adopt a new style of life. His call is to value him above anyone and anything else, to lay down our lives, and to become his disciples.

Jesus asks the same of those of us who have bought into the graded-Christian system, "Can you be my disciple?" Can you set aside the whole notion of the graded-Christian system and recognize that the one calling on us is to be disciples of Jesus.

Jesus asks those of us who are stalled out in our Christian faith, "Can you be my disciple?" There is no convenient time to value Jesus above anyone and everything else and to lay down our lives to be his disciples. There is no point at which we will be fully prepared to be on mission with Jesus. His call to us is to be disciples of Jesus. Now.

#### **Recognize the decision Jesus requires us to make.**

Can you be my disciple?

That's the decision Jesus requires us to make.

Recognizing that decision is the start of the cost-benefit analysis.