

# Identify and Value Costs and Benefits

Cost-Benefit Analysis Series, November 19 & 20, 2022 | Luke 14:25-33

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What are the costs and benefits of being Jesus' disciple?

**Last week we began a cost-benefit analysis of the Christian faith.**

The first step of a cost-benefit analysis is to identify the question we're asking.

What are the goals and objectives of the project?

In step one we identified the fact that Jesus requires us to decide, "Can you be my disciple?"

That's the decision we face in Luke 14:25-33.

**There are a total of four "Steps of a Cost-Benefit Analysis":**

1. Establish a Framework for Your Analysis (As I said, we did this last week.)
2. Identify Your Costs and Benefits
3. Assign a Value to Each Cost and Benefit
4. Tally the Total Value of Benefits and Costs and Compare. This is what we'll do next week.

This week, we look at steps two and three. We will identify and value the costs and the benefits of being Jesus' disciples.

**Eating at a restaurant helps us to understand the many sides of costs and benefits.**

When you eat at a restaurant, there are obvious costs. You pay for your meal.

There are also costs involved in driving to the restaurant and the costs of your time.

There is even the cost of the opportunity to be at your home.

When you eat at a restaurant, there are also benefits. You get the food you eat.

You get the experience of enjoying the food, probably food that's different from your normal fare. Plus, you get the convenience of not preparing the food yourself.

And you may get the opportunity to be with others in the process.

**What are the costs and benefits of being Jesus' disciples?**

We must identify and value the costs and benefits of being Jesus' disciples.

**In Luke 14:28-30, Jesus calls us to think about a person considering building a tower:**

*"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.'"*

**Let's look at Jesus' parable about a person building a tower.**

*"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first ... count the cost?"*

The tower is likely a storage structure that's part of a wall around a vineyard or a place to store equipment and the harvest on a farm.

If one does not first count the cost of building the tower, then one might not have the resources to complete the project. Everyone who sees the incomplete tower will mock the builder and tease him for starting to build but not being able to finish. That would be awful.

So, the force of the parable is this: "For which of you looking to build a tower would not first count the cost to make sure you have enough money to finish? Of course, none of you would do that. Then do not neglect to first count the cost of being my disciple. There is a cost, and to start and not have the follow-through to finish would be humiliating."

**Then in Luke 14:31-32, Jesus calls us to think about a king considering going to war:**

*"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. "*

**Let's look at Jesus' parable about a king considering going to war.**

What king preparing for war doesn't first count the cost of winning? Does he have enough troops with the training, experience, supplies, and leadership to overcome his opponent?

If it appears so, then he goes to war. Otherwise, he sues for peace before the battle begins to avoid disaster.

"What king doesn't first count the cost?" Obviously, no king.

If no king will go to war without a chance of victory, then do not become Jesus' disciple without first thinking about whether you can pay the costs.

**Jesus uses the image of counting the cost. What exactly does that mean?**

The word used here for counting the cost is built on the word for pebble or little stone.

These are the stones used in mosaics or board games.

When used in the plural sense, these stones were used for counting.

Later, these stones would be used for voting. When a group of people needed to vote on a decision or come to a verdict, everyone would be given a stone. They would literally or figuratively put their stones in respective piles, bags, or boxes to vote—this individual or that, yes or no, guilty or innocent. The vote was determined by the number of stones in each box. <sup>1</sup>

That's what Jesus is telling us to do here. Make two piles of stones—one for the costs and one for the benefits. Count the stones. Count the cost.

## Four Costs of Being Jesus' Disciples

**This list is not exhaustive. We could identify others.**

This is simply the list Jesus calls us to think through right here.

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<sup>1</sup> Kittel, et al. (1985). In [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume](#) (p. 1341). W.B. Eerdmans.

Let's read **Luke 14:25-27 and 33**: *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 ... So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

### **Before we dig in, we have to address the word "hate."**

That word "hate" is tough to read in Jesus' teachings. He seems to be saying that we must hate our families, lives, and stuff. Understanding this word is key to understanding all of the costs.

We know that Jesus doesn't mean absolute, psychological hatred. That's forbidden. Look at **1 John 2:9** that says,

*"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness."*

What, then, does he mean? "Hate," in Hebrew, can have at least two different senses.

Hate can imply an emotional or psychological distaste or disgust for something or someone.

However, "hate" can also imply relative value. "This I love and this I hate" can mean that I value one thing over another in Hebrew.

While the New Testament is written in Greek, Hebrew idioms sometimes come through.

The use of hatred as a way of valuing one thing over another is shown in **Matthew 6:24** where Jesus says,

*"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*

It's not about loathing but about relative value.

In fact, Jesus says something very similar to what he is driving at here in Luke 14 in **Matthew 10:37**.

There he says,

*"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

That shows us thoroughly that what Jesus means when he says "hate" here is that his disciples value him definitively more than they value anything else.

So, what are the costs of being Jesus' disciples?

### **1. Family Impact**

Being a disciple of Jesus can cause problems in families.

We do not all live in families where everyone is a disciple of Jesus.

In some families, this leads to problems and disagreements. In families with mixed faith, we may disagree about belief itself. Other times, the moral stands the Bible takes cause division with family members who have different thoughts about right and wrong.

When you are a disciple of Jesus, following Jesus and being on mission with Jesus take precedence over family unity and convenience. That's tough!

We must value Jesus above family unity and convenience.

### **2. Life Interruption**

That's what Jesus means when he says that we must hate our lives if we are to be his disciples.

Again, it doesn't mean that we have disgust for life itself.

Instead, it means that we are willing to set aside the path our lives were on before we became his disciples in favor of the path he wants us to walk.

Paul knew exactly what Jesus meant here. He had a posh life before meeting Jesus. Then he met Jesus; of course, his life gained all new kinds of significance as he launched the Church and wrote much of the New Testament. However, his life was totally different.

Paul reflected on this reality in **Philippians 3:7-8** where he wrote:

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. ...*

We must be prepared for our lives to be interrupted when we are Jesus' disciples.

### **3. Taking Up Our Own Cross**

When Jesus tells us to take up our own crosses, he does mean it figuratively in the sense that we lay down our lives to put him first.

At times, Jesus also means that we take up crosses literally.

To follow Jesus means that we will frequently (normally) be at odds with the culture around us.

We will be opposed. We will be ridiculed. We may even be persecuted.

Jesus tells us to be ready! In **John 15:18** Jesus said,

*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."*

There are people dying in parts of the world today for Christian faith. They have taken up their crosses. We cannot expect that such will never happen to us. We must be ready.

### **4. Rethinking Our Possessions**

Jesus says that his disciples renounce all we have.

It's not that we immediately give away everything we own or never have or own anything.

However, sometimes that's exactly what Jesus means.

Who controls us? Our things? Or Jesus?

Disciples of Jesus belong to him and not to our stuff.

## **Five Benefits of Being Jesus' Disciples**

### **Jesus doesn't outline the benefits of being his disciples in Luke 14:25-33.**

I'd like to use God's Story as a framework for listing the benefits of being Jesus' disciples.

God's Story has five chapters that show us the fundamental benefits of being Jesus' disciples.

#### **1. Purposeful Existence**

Chapter One of God's Story is "Creation." In this chapter we learn that God made the world, everything in it, and us. Consider for just a moment what that means to disciples of Jesus.

Most people go through life assuming that we are the result of random forces that just happen to lead to our existence. We come from nowhere and are going nowhere. How sad!

As disciples of Jesus, we know that we were created by God on purpose. He meant to create us, and he lovingly sustains our existence every moment of every day.

He made us who we are, as we are, when we are for a reason!

Disciples of Jesus know that we have a purposeful existence.

## **2. Loving Accountability**

Chapter Two of God's Story is "Brokenness." In this chapter we learn that God has a plan for our lives and that he expects us to live according to that plan. That fact by itself is good news. In a world that assumes we make our own rules, we discover that right and wrong exist.

Even better, we learn that when we disobeyed God and walked away from him, he did not walk away from us. Instead, we get loving accountability. We are responsible for our actions, but we are not rejected eternally for our actions.

We can't save ourselves from our sin. However, God has a plan in Jesus to save us from our sin.

Disciples of Jesus know that we live with loving accountability.

## **3. Forgiveness and Adoption**

Chapter Three of God's Story is "Jesus." In this chapter we learn that Jesus, God the Son, took on human flesh and came to be where we are. He lived a perfect and sinless life. He took on the full weight of our sin and died in our place as the perfect sacrifice to pay the price for our sin. Then he rose from the dead three days later, victorious over sin, death, and evil.

Now we can be forgiven for our sin when we accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness.

When we are forgiven, we are adopted as sons and daughters of God.

That's nothing like the world around us!

Disciples of Jesus know that we are forgiven and that we are sons and daughters of God.

## **4. New Life**

Chapter Four of God's Story is "The Church." In this chapter we learn that God has given us the Holy Spirit to begin shaping us into the image of Christ. He gives us gifts for serving him and makes us part of the family of faith in the Church.

We are not who we were before; we are never alone!

Disciples of Jesus know that we have new life with a new faith family and a new mission.

## **5. Eternal Glory**

Chapter Five of God's Story is "Return." In this chapter we learn that King Jesus is coming again to make the world as it is into the world as it should be.

When Jesus comes again, we will be resurrected to live with him forever.

Plus, he will forever wipe away sin, death, and evil.

Disciples of Jesus know that this life is not the end, and that eternal glory is our destiny!

These are just the beginning of the benefits of being disciples of Jesus!

Let's value both the costs and benefits of being Jesus' disciples.

**Let's go back to that image of putting rocks in piles to weigh costs and benefits.**

In some ways, it's just the meaning of the word "count."

And yet, it's exactly what we do when we identify the costs and benefits of following Jesus. We identify a cost and put a rock mentally in the cost pile; we identify a benefit and put a rock mentally in the benefit pile.

It's even a good way to think about how we value both costs and benefits. If we're looking at a cost, and it's a big cost like getting into a conflict with our families over faith, then we put lots of rocks in the cost pile.

**Figuratively, this is exactly what we do when we identify and value costs and benefits.**

We do the whole process privately; we don't tell anyone.

Sometimes we even carry out this process subconsciously; we don't even know we're doing it!

Consequently, sometimes we value odd things, and we value things oddly.

Sometimes we identify a cost like our kids not being able to participate in sports on Sundays, and we put loads of rocks in that pile because we're quietly and subconsciously turning our kids and their happiness into an idol.

Sometimes we identify a benefit like eternal glory. We should put a ~~whole~~, giant pile of rocks down on the benefit side to value eternal glory. If we're thinking clearly, we'd do that. But somewhere, deep down, silently, even subconsciously, we devalue eternity. We can't see it, so we value it less. We tell ourselves in the deep recesses of our minds, "It'll all work out anyway."

We overly value the costs of discipleship, and we undervalue the benefits.

**Like so many things in the Christian life, we need to be honest and transparent about our valuations.**

We do far too little talking about discipleship and the Christian life as it is.

We do even less talking in an honest and transparent way about what we really think and do.

That has to change. We have to talk honestly and transparently about what we're doing and thinking as we live the Christian life.

Particularly, we have to talk honestly and transparently about what we're doing and thinking as we identify and value the costs and benefits of the Christian life.

**Jesus' own valuation process reminds us that we may have our valuations wrong.**

Our valuation process overly rewards earthly comfort and avoids earthly discomfort.

That same valuation process undervalues heavenly glory.

How would we value the weight of the cross and the glory of heaven?

**Hebrews 12:1-2** tells us how Jesus did it and that he got it right:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before*

*him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus saw clearly that the glory of heaven far outweighed the suffering of the cross.

He is our model in valuing the costs and benefits of being his disciples.

**Only when we're being honest and transparent with our valuations will our cost-benefit analysis work.**

What are the costs of being disciples? What are they really to us?

What are the benefits? What are the real benefits?

How do we value both? But what are each really worth?

How do we identify and value the costs and benefits of being disciples of Jesus?

These are steps 2 and 3 of our cost benefit analysis.