

Discipleship's Cost

(Mark 8:34-36)

'Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. 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 is the Incarnation of God.' - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Mark reminds us that following Jesus is not a 'once-and-for-all' decision. Living a life that enlarges the kingdom of God comes with struggles and challenges. Mark highlights Jesus' patience, empathy, understanding and grace with the disciples as He watches them fall short, fail, make mistakes...while they're challenged with the cost of discipleship. Does this sound familiar? Can any of you relate?

READ TOGETHER:

Mark 8:34-36 (NIV): 'Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?'

Jesus clearly lays out the challenging COST of following Him - a cost that can only be carried with a divine grace only HE can provide, and an empowering that can only come from our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

EXPLORE TOGETHER:

Have three group members read out each of the following points and Bible verse - then discuss and share:

1. The disciples let Jesus take the lead (Matthew 16:24 MSG) - Jesus makes an extraordinary invitation, 'Follow me, and I'll show you how'. We need to let Jesus take the 'driver's seat' through prayer, reading the Word, and guidance by the Holy Spirit.

Discuss: How do you 'let Jesus' take the lead with the way you work on your own character, identity, dreams, regrets? How do we include the Holy Spirit in our decision-making?

2. Disciples self-sacrifice, and sacrifice 'self' (Romans 12:1-2) - this is the key of discipleship. "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20 (NLT) . This is costly, especially when our natural desires (i.e. for material wealth, gratification, desire for power or recognition) have become our identity . We sacrifice 'self' with our choices and decision-making; by increasing our faith; by developing our convictions when it comes to holiness, relationships, and generosity etc., simply put by becoming more like Jesus.

Discuss: When have you had to sacrifice one pursuit for another? If you feel comfortable share with the group what is one thing in your life God has been asking you to lay down in this season?

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3. Disciples embrace suffering (Romans 5:1-5) - We identify ourselves as Jesus-followers by taking up our cross, as He did. Embracing suffering and 'taking up our cross' recognises that living a divine, purpose-filled life comes the way it did for Jesus - a path that included pain, struggle, self-sacrifice and surrender all the way to the cross. Remember, Mark wrote his Gospel in the era of Emperor Nero, one of the most notorious persecutors of Christians of all time. Disciples were willing to be - and many were, including Mark himself (who was killed by an Alexandrian mob in AD68) - martyred for their faith and convictions.

Discuss: When has following Jesus cost you something relationally, materially, or personally?

PRAY TOGETHER:

Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me. As we grow in our faith and mature as disciples, give us guidance and strength concerning how we 'count the cost' of following Jesus. Help us with our choices, being able to deny ourselves and take up our cross - with the strength and inspiration of Jesus' example. Help us lay down our own lives - not bound by material possessions or unhealthy and unnecessary distractions. Help us be able to say, 'Not I, but Christ... not my will, but Yours be done'. We ask this together, Amen.

GOING DEEPER:

This week, share these resources with your connect group, so they can explore and take inspiration from:

- **Book:** [Foxy's Book of Martyrs: Updated Up to the 21st Century](#)
- Explore the work of 'Open Doors' who support and minister worldwide to the 'persecuted Church' - <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/>