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# GROWING IN GRACE

## UNIT 1: WHAT IS JESUS' METHOD?

### THE BIG IDEA: DISCIPLESHIP

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#### OBJECTIVES

- To learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus
- To show that discipleship springs from and is sustained by grace
- To correct misguided approaches to discipleship
- To identify personal roadblocks to discipleship

#### THE GRACIOUS CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

*<sup>13</sup> And Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out. ~ Mark 3.13-14*

Jesus of Nazareth lived in near total obscurity on the periphery of the Roman Empire for the duration of his all too brief life. He was born into a lower to middle class Jewish family and raised to be a common craftsman in a small village. Jesus had no financial resources, academic training, or political connections. He did not speak Greek or Latin, the languages of the Empire. He never owned a home. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place of his birth. Jesus' public career was limited to his early 30s and lasted no more than two or three years. We do not even know what Jesus looked like. Ancient historians recognized him as a wise teacher and a wonder worker, yet he is perhaps best known not for the events of his life, but rather for the manner of his death. In the end, Jesus was brutally and shamefully crucified on a Roman cross like a common criminal and left to die.

On the face of it, there is no reason for Jesus to be remembered or revered by anyone. And yet, Jesus remains the most recognizable and influential figure in the history of civilization. Billions of people around the globe identify themselves as followers of this man. Jesus forms the heart of their relationship with God, the object of their worship, the center of their lives, and the inspiration behind their mission. Though it may come as a surprise to some, the number of Christians worldwide increases by the thousands on a daily basis. No other person has generated so much reflection and discourse, or inspired so much art, architecture, literature, music, and film. There is no aspect of human life where we do not find the trace of his fingertips.

The question we must ask, then, is this: How did he do it? Of course, Jesus' mission was powered by the Spirit of God, and we will have much more to say about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. But if the Spirit was the engine that powered the mission, what was the vehicle for the transmission of Jesus' life and message? How did Jesus launch the most-successful and enduring movement in the history of the world without money, credentials, or connections?

How did he do it? Though Jesus' words and actions and their implications are contained for us in the writings of the New Testament, Jesus himself never wrote a book. He formed a community. That was his legacy. Jesus' chosen method for launching and propelling his movement was - and is - discipleship. Jesus invested his time and energy in a number of highly intentional relationships. Jesus called a small group of people to

“be with him” – that is, to listen to him, to live with him, and to learn from him – and to “send them out” to represent his purposes in the world (Mark 3.14). Likewise, Jesus charges us to follow the same strategy for passing on the faith to others: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28.19). The call of every single Christian is to become a disciple who makes disciples of others – and so it goes. That is how Jesus’ movement grows and spreads.

What is the problem? As others have pointed out, the problem is that, by and large, the Christian church in the West has abandoned Jesus’ method and has made discipleship merely optional for the Christian life. Somehow, we have come to think that one can be a Christian without being a disciple of Jesus. We assume that the term “disciple” refers to some kind of “super-Christian” who is particularly “serious” about his or her faith, whereas the rest of us can remain content without any signs of progress towards becoming more like Christ. Yet the word “disciple” is never used in the Bible as an optional choice in the Christian life. In fact, the word “disciple” occurs 269 times in the New Testament, while the word “Christian” is only used three times, and that word was first introduced to refer to none other than the “disciples” of Jesus. It is flatly impossible to be a Christian and not be a disciple of Jesus.

To be a disciple, therefore, simply means to be a student or an apprentice of Jesus. A disciple is someone who is learning to live by grace under the loving and active reign of God. A disciple seeks to follow Jesus by relying on his Spirit and learning not only from Jesus’ teaching, but also from Jesus’ life. To be a disciple means you are committed to listening to his words, doing what he says, practicing what he taught, and following where he leads. It does not matter how far along you may be in the process. What matters is who you are following. There are no differentiated levels of discipleship for the beginner, the intermediate, or the advanced. Therefore, from the first day until the last, if you are seeking to learn from Jesus in order to become more like him, you are a disciple, and regardless of where you may be in the process, you are called to make disciples of others. In fact, the fastest way to grow as a Christian is immediately to share with others what you are learning from Jesus.

With that said, we also must be on guard against making the opposite mistake. In our enthusiasm for discipleship, we may seek to “disciple others” or “be discipled” by someone whom we perceive to be more mature than us. This often leads to a programmatic approach in which a so-called “discipler” meets with his or her “disciple” on a set schedule and gives that person “homework” in scripture reading, “exercises” in prayer or other spiritual practices, or “challenges” in moral improvement or “sexual purity.” This approach is not only programmatic, but it also easily veers into moralistic and legalistic attitudes leaving the “discipler” feeling proud and self-righteous and plaguing the “disciple” with a performance-based mindset towards spirituality that is often accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame.

This programmatic approach has nothing to do with Jesus’ model. Jesus’ relationships were organic not mechanical, and they were marked by God’s super-abounding grace despite human rebellion, brokenness, and failure. Of course, there is a rightful place for healthy mentoring relationships, but we must maintain clarity on this issue. There are no “gurus” in the Christian life other than Jesus himself. We do not have disciples. Rather, we are called to make fellow disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is ultimately God’s work in us by the power of the Spirit. It’s not our work in the lives of others based on our own self-advancing effort. Even so-called “leaders,” and perhaps especially those who think they are “leaders” within the church, need to be continually discipled by Jesus. Jesus is the true master, and we all comprise his apprentices.

What does this look like in practice? Discipleship is a lifelong process not a program, so our focus must be to create a culture not a curriculum of life change. The ultimate purpose is not merely to disseminate new information but rather to promote life transformation. A curriculum, a class, or a program can provide much needed information, but true transformation occurs in the context of relationship. We are seeking,

therefore, to build a culture where followers of Jesus from all different backgrounds will share their loves, their learnings, and their lives with one another in order to help one another become more like our great master teacher. “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6.40). God’s overarching desire is to make us like Jesus – to conform us to the image of his Son (Romans 8.29). When we align our goals with God’s, we discover the true purpose of our lives and bring God the glory that he so richly deserves.

We have emphasized the relational priority to discipleship, but of course there is content that needs to be learned and passed on which is why we have developed these materials. Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples” by “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you to do” (Matthew 28.20). Theology is essential. Clearly, what we believe matters because that will shape how we live. We cannot drive a wedge between beliefs and practices. They go together. The purpose of these studies, therefore, is to provide some of the teaching that must be learned and the practices that must be followed in order to become more like Jesus. But the best way for this teaching and these practices to have maximal impact on your life is to use them as a springboard for sharing your thoughts, questions, problems, struggles, hopes, fears, and prayers with others.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe what it means to be a disciple.
2. What attracts you to Jesus and his teaching? Why do you think Jesus is so magnetic?
3. What is the difference between a relational versus a programmatic approach to discipleship? What potential pitfalls must be avoided?
4. What is the proper relationship between beliefs and practices in the life of a disciple?

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### SCRIPTURE STUDY: LUKE 5:1-11

*<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them*

*and were washing their nets.<sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.<sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."<sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."<sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.<sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.<sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."<sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,<sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."<sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

## **UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT**

### **Jesus Calls Disciples to Listen to His Word.**

This episode starts out simply enough as Jesus speaks to a group of people by the shore, but the crowd grows and grows as many come "to hear the word of God" (Luke 5.1). This forces Jesus to improvise. Jesus knew that sound carries over water, so he commandeers one of the nearby boats belonging to Simon, also known as Peter, and asks its captain to shove off from land so that he can address the people.

Luke emphasizes the crowds that were "pressing in" (Luke 5.1) on Jesus, but clearly the crowds included Simon and the other fishermen. What is rather striking is that Luke plainly and unassumingly identifies the words of Jesus with the "word of God" (Luke 5.1). This reveals the essence of discipleship. To be a disciple of Jesus means to listen to Jesus' word in Scripture and to learn from Jesus' life and teaching. Jesus has wisdom to impart to us about how to live life with God. There is an inescapably didactic component to discipleship. If we would be his disciple, we have to listen to him.

As for Jesus' first disciples, so for us, the real learning takes place not in a classroom, but in the context of a relationship as we allow the words of Jesus to penetrate our hearts and transform our lives. Years later people would be astonished by the power, wisdom, and knowledge of these very same men who had received no formal training. They received something better. "They had been with Jesus," as noted by those who were shocked by their newfound authority (Acts 4.13). It is only through intimate contact with Jesus (and fellow disciples committed to his way) that we will become like Christ. We must spend time with Jesus in order to listen to his word and to learn from him.

### **Jesus Calls Disciples to Do What He Says.**

As soon as Jesus finished speaking, he asks Simon to let down his nets once more for a catch. Simon models a life of discipleship by obeying Jesus' words even though the request ran contrary to his "better judgment." Put yourself in Simon's shoes for a moment. Simon was a professional fisherman. He had already worked all night at his craft and caught absolutely nothing leaving him exhausted. The nets he used would have been made out of linen which would have made them visible to the fish. That is why he fished at night when the nets were less likely to be seen. Now that it was day, fishing with such nets would be a futile exercise. In sum, Simon had every reason to disregard Jesus' instructions. Nevertheless Simon, though reluctant, obeys - "But at your word I will let down the nets" (Luke 5.4).

This is the essence of discipleship. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14.15). A disciple recognizes that Jesus is the master and thus obeys Jesus even if his words do not seem

to make any sense. Like Simon, we could come up with similar excuses for ignoring Jesus' words – "I'm the expert!" – "I have already tried that!" – "I know what I am doing!" – "It won't make a difference!" But a disciple obeys Jesus without condition. A disciple simply says, "At your word, I will do what you say."

Jesus is not our personal assistant who is there when we need him to manage our affairs and solve our problems. Nor is he a consultant who offers us advice which we can choose to follow or ignore while we retain control over decision-making. Jesus is our master. To be his disciple means that you yield final authority over your life to him. To be a disciple of Jesus is never a merely intellectual exercise because discipleship demands obedience.

This may seem daunting, which is why it is important to realize that Jesus changes the very nature of obedience from duty to delight. For some, obedience to any command is nothing but joyless drudgery. We do it simply because we have to. Others view obedience as a way to try to force God to do what you want. "If I do what God says in this area of my life, then God is obligated to accept me – to bless me – to make my life go well." But God's grace in Jesus Christ revolutionizes our conception of obedience. We learn to obey God not because we have to but because we want to – not in order to win God's favor, but to demonstrate we already have it – not motivated by duty or obligation, but motivated by gratitude and joy. Moreover, we can never obligate God to us. We can't use our obedience as a means to twist God's arm and get him to do what we want. God owes us nothing, yet he offers us everything that matters. Therefore, we strive to love, serve, and please God not to get things from God, but to get God. Of course, given the hardness of our hearts, there will be moments in our life of discipleship when we do not feel like obeying, yet we must continue to do so until our gratitude is kindled once again. In the long run, true obedience always springs from the joyful realization of what Jesus has already done for you. Therefore, you must consistently turn your thoughts back to what Jesus has done for you, not what you must do for him. You can imagine that after Simon Peter listened to Jesus' word on this spectacular fishing trip, he was more than willing to listen the next time Jesus made another seemingly bizarre or difficult command. The more we follow Jesus, the more we learn to trust him.

### **Jesus Calls Disciples by an Act of Sheer Grace.**

The moment that Simon drops the nets, he hits the jackpot! He cannot control the number of fish piling into the nets and must signal to others for help. As the nets reach breaking point and the two boats begin to sink with the weight of this fish, Simon realizes that he is standing in the presence of someone supremely other than himself. He is not merely astonished; he is terrified. Simon knows fishing, and he understands what this means. He suddenly becomes aware of his own unworthiness and sin and cannot bear the presence of Jesus. He does not ask Jesus to stay – as we might assume – so that they could "go into business and make a killing together." No, he drops to his knees and asks Jesus to leave: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This is the classic response in Scripture of any person who enters into the divine presence. When Isaiah receives a vision of the Lord seated on his throne, he does not respond by saying, "Wow!" but "Woe!" – "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6). Isaiah knows that he is a dead man. No human being can stand before the divine presence and live.

Simon likewise is not overstating the case. He is a sinful man and should have nothing to do with Jesus. He recognizes the distance between him and Jesus and is gripped with fear. But Jesus does not condemn Simon and depart. Rather Jesus accepts Simon and remains, offering these reassuring words, "Do not be afraid." This is how Jesus calls every disciple. The call to discipleship is not a call to service or volunteerism. It is a call of grace. Jesus does not ask you to follow him because he needs your help and you have something uniquely to offer. You are unworthy of him, but Jesus nevertheless calls you to be with him and transforms your identity and purpose through his grace. God does not love you because you are qualified, but God qualifies you because he loves you (Colossians 1.12). That is grace. There is no discipleship apart from this

encounter with the holy and gracious Lord. Disciples are not members of the spiritual elite, but rather they are “unworthy servants” (Luke 17:10) whose identity is rooted in Jesus’ gracious acceptance despite their sin.

### **Jesus Calls Disciples to Participate in his Mission.**

Talk about spiritual formation and discipleship can often become inward-focused and self-absorbed. But the goal of discipleship is not to nurture a private religious experience. The goal of discipleship is to equip you for participation in God’s mission. Look at Simon. He is overwhelmed, kneeling before Jesus in the boat surrounded by the largest catch of fish he has ever witnessed. Jesus tells him, “From now on, you will be catching men.” With one stroke, Jesus radically transforms Simon’s calling in life. He was catching fish; now he will be catching people. Some may object to the image because fishermen catch fish in order for them to be eaten and consumed. But the word Luke uses means more literally “to catch alive.” The image speaks of rescue not destruction. We have to understand that for the ancients, the sea represented the forces of evil that threaten to destroy and undo human life. Therefore, to catch people means to draw them out of the darkness and chaos of their lives in order to rescue them for God.

The point is that when Jesus calls you to be his disciple, he calls you to share in his work. You are not called to be a consumer of Jesus’ merit. You are called to be a participant in his mission. That does not mean that Jesus obliterates your personality – far from it! No, it means that you discover your true person by finding your identity in Jesus as he redirects the priorities, passion, values, commitments, and goals of your life. Your actual vocation may remain the same, but as for Simon, so for you, it may take on an entirely different form in light of Jesus.

### **Jesus Calls Disciples to Treasure Him Above All Else.**

Luke informs us that when Simon and his business partners brought their boats to land, “they left everything, and followed him” (Luke 5:11). They left their nets, their boats, and two boatloads full of fish! Think of the sum value of all of this. They did not merely leave two boatloads of groceries behind. They left two boatloads of wealth, two boatloads of comfort, two boatloads of security, two boatloads of significance. And why did they do it? They left it all behind not because they were especially spiritual or self-sacrificial. They were not competing to win a piety contest. They left it all behind because Jesus was worth more. There is a real cost to discipleship, but the disciple recognizes that Jesus is more valuable than anything we might leave behind. Jesus is the pearl of great price. Jesus is the treasure hidden in the field.

The question is: How do we respond to this unique and challenging call to leave everything and follow him? The only way to commit to Jesus is to see how he has already radically committed himself to you. Jesus is not asking you to do anything for him that he has not already done for you. He left the glories of heaven by becoming a human being. He gave up his comfort, security, and significance. He left his Father’s side and was forsaken on the cross for your sin. But he did it all for you! And now he calls you to leave behind whatever might hinder you from being his disciple.

This is what sets Jesus apart from every other founder of one of the major world religions. Other teachers point away from themselves and essentially say, “This is the truth, as far as I perceive it, follow this path, and you will find life.” Jesus, by contrast, rather audaciously points to himself and says, “I am the truth. Follow me, and I will give you life.” In every other religion, the teaching is primary and the events are secondary. If you take away the events in the life of Buddha or Confucius or Muhammad, the teaching still stands. It doesn’t matter how the founder lived or died. All you must do is follow the path they laid out for you. But in Christianity, the events are primary and the teaching is secondary. If you take away the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, then the teaching becomes meaningless. This is what makes Christianity unique.

The call to discipleship is ultimately a call not to a path, but to a person. This person can be trusted because

he has already demonstrated his radical commitment and unconditional love to you.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The crowds were “pressing in” to hear the word of God from Jesus. How would you describe your level of interest in learning from Jesus and becoming more like him? Are you eager, bored, confused, complacent, overwhelmed?
2. What reasons could Simon Peter have had for resisting Jesus’ words? What excuses do you commonly give for not doing what Jesus says?
3. What is the motivation for listening to Jesus and following his word?
4. Peter’s discipleship began with an encounter with Jesus that revealed his own unworthiness and yet simultaneously assured him of Jesus’ gracious acceptance. Share moments with one another when the reality of your sinfulness and the surpassing nature of God’s grace have been most experientially real to you.
5. Consider some of the major areas of your life: career and vocation, friends and romantic relationships, money and possessions, power and influence, marriage and family, leisure activities and time management, sexual integrity and self-image. Is there an area where you are resistant to listening to Jesus and doing what he says?
6. What do you most value about Jesus? In what areas of life have you found that he is “worth more”?

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE: MATTHEW 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

## PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray that God would give you a deeper appreciation for Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection and move you from a discipleship of duty to one of delight.
- Pray that God would grant you clarity about what it means to approach discipleship programmatically and help you to see how you are tempted to do that.
- Pray that God would give you a fresh vision of his glory and his grace and grant you a willingness to follow him even when it is difficult or costly.
- Pray for God to deepen our relationships with him and with one another so that we would encourage and celebrate the transformations that he is working in and through each of us.

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## FOR FURTHER STUDY: MARK 8:27-38

*<sup>27</sup> And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." <sup>30</sup> And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.*

*<sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

*<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

1. The consensus view among Jesus' disciples was that people thought he was a prophet like Moses or Elijah or perhaps he was John the Baptist back from the dead. Who do people in our culture think Jesus is? How do they perceive him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Jesus asks his disciples the all-important question: "But who do you say that I am?" What is your

conception of Jesus? How do you relate to him in practice? If someone were to study the way in which you actually live your life, what would they conclude you believe about Jesus?

3. While Peter's profession of Jesus as the Christ is correct, it is incomplete. The disciples expected the Christ to be a nationalistic leader who would expel the Romans and make Israel a great nation again. This is why Jesus commands the disciples not to use the title, "Christ" or "Messiah," until the appropriate time (after his death and resurrection) for fear that his vocation will be drastically misunderstood. How does Jesus begin to educate the disciples on what it means for Jesus to be the Christ?
  
4. Read Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53. How does Jesus combine the image of the "son of man" and the "suffering servant" to clarify his identity and mission?
  
5. Peter takes Jesus aside and scolds him for his conception of messiahship. As far as Peter is concerned, a dead messiah is a failed messiah. In what ways does Jesus refuse to fit into the box that you would prefer to squeeze him into?
  
6. Jesus must rebuke Peter in front of all the disciples because Peter tempts Jesus to be a Christ without a cross. In what way does this reveal that Peter is thinking like Satan rather than God?
  
7. If there is no Christ without a cross, then there can be no Christians without a cross either. Jesus immediately transitions from explaining the true nature of messiahship to the true nature of discipleship. He states that all would-be followers must take up their cross and follow him. Why would Jesus use such a shocking image to describe the nature of discipleship?
  
8. Jesus is not telling us that we all have "a cross to bear" in the sense that we all must accept our unique

set of personal trials and struggles. Nor is Jesus suggesting that we must deny ourselves certain pleasures or experiences and adopt an ascetic lifestyle in order to follow him. Jesus is not saying that we must merely deny things to ourselves. Rather, Jesus is saying we must deny ourselves in order to be his follower. What is currently standing in the way of you becoming a more fully devoted follower of Jesus?

9. What seemingly paradoxical truths does Jesus reveal about self-denial? In what ways have you discovered these truths to be real in your own life?

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### **FURTHER READING: DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP* (1937)**

Revival of church life always brings in its train a richer understanding of the Scriptures. Behind all the slogans and catchwords of ecclesiastical controversy, necessary though they are, there arises a more determined quest for him who is the sole object of it all, for Jesus Christ himself. What did Jesus mean to say to us? What is his will for us today?...

Let us get back to the Scriptures, to the Word and call of Jesus Christ himself. Let us try to get away from the poverty and pettiness of our own little convictions and problems, and seek the wealth and splendor which are vouchsafed to us in Jesus Christ.

We propose to tell how Jesus calls us to be his disciples...And if we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand? To answer this question we shall have to go to him, for only he knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey's end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy...

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace...

Cheap grace means...everything can remain as it was before...Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

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. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, “Follow me.” It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1.17; John 21.22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesareth, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occasion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesareth, and once again the call is: “Follow me.” Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Halfway between them comes Peter’s confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God. Three times Peter hears the same proclamation that Christ is his Lord and God – at the beginning, at the end, and at Caesarea Philippi. Each time it is the same grace of Christ which calls to him “Follow me” and which reveals itself to him in his confession of the Son of God. Three times on Peter’s way did grace arrest him, the one grace proclaimed in three different ways.

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme follow-ship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs...

This message must be spoken for the sake of truth, for those among us who confess that through cheap grace they have lost the following of Christ, and further, with the following of Christ, have lost the understanding of costly grace. To put it quite simply, we must undertake this task because we are now ready to admit that we no longer stand in the path of true discipleship. We confess that, although our Church is orthodox as far as her doctrine of grace is concerned, we are no longer sure that we are members of a Church which follows its Lord. We must therefore attempt to recover a true understanding of the mutual relation between grace and discipleship. The issue can no longer be evaded. It is becoming clearer every day that the most urgent problem besetting our Church is this: How can we live the Christian life in the modern world?

Happy are they who have reached the end of the road we seek to tread, who are astonished to discover the by no means self-evident truth that grace is costly just because it is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Happy are the simple followers of Jesus Christ who have been overcome by his grace, and are able to sing the praises of the all-sufficient grace of Christ with humbleness of heart. Happy are they who, knowing that grace, can live in the world without being of it, who, by following Jesus Christ, are so assured of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world. Happy are they who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship. Happy are they who have become Christians in this sense of the word. For them the word of grace has proved a fount of mercy.