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HATE YOUR FAMILY



What are some things people start but don't finish?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Loving Jesus should be so intense it makes everything else look like hate.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

France may have had its Eiffel Tower, but Britain had Sir Edward Watkin, an ambitious railroad businessman who decided London should have its own tower. His tower would be fully 200 feet taller and make people forget the ugly French Tower. Sure, the Eiffel Tower had restaurants, but Watkin's tower would have restaurants, theaters, Turkish baths, two observation decks, and a ninety-room hotel. At the very top would sit an astronomical observatory.

Watkin's tower had only one drawback: It was never finished. Despite Sir Edward's grandiose plans, his tower only reached 154 feet before he ran out of funds and building stopped in 1894. Then they discovered where he was building was totally unsuitable for a tower. It sat there in its sad unfinished state until it was torn down in 1907.¹

We've all had big plans that never came to pass. Unfortunately, many of us come to Christ with great plans in how we will follow Him, but our commitment does not always match our plans. Jesus longs for us to follow Him, but He also wants us to know exactly what it means to be His disciple. He calls us to count the cost.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 14:25-27

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

At this point in Jesus’ ministry, He was certainly popular. Many were drawn to Jesus as the miracle worker who fed them, healed them, and taught them with great authority. They were looking for more of the same, but Jesus turned to them and challenged them to move from being superficial followers to become fully committed disciples.

Disciple includes the idea of following someone, but it goes far deeper than how we typically use the word “follower.” A disciple wants to learn, and he also wants to adhere to what he learns; a disciple wants to fully imitate the one he follows. Those who truly follow Jesus want to be trained by Him so that they can be just like Him.

Jesus didn’t issue this invitation to a select, elite group. He said it to a large mass of people—ordinary people. Consider the twelve apostles who walked closely with Jesus. Nothing was special about them; they were fishermen, tax collectors, and rebels. These men had their doubts and insecurities, yet they still chose to follow Jesus. It should be encouraging to us that Jesus calls ordinary people.

At this point, Jesus was nearing the end of His ministry (Luke 9:51). He knew everything that was about to happen, and He challenged the disciples and followers to search deeper and be even more committed to following Him. That challenge came with a powerful, hard-to-swallow statement. You can’t be Jesus’ disciple if you do not hate: Parents, wife and children, brothers and sisters, your own life.

Why do you think many people are initially attracted to Jesus?

QUESTION #2

That's rough. *Really? Jesus wants me to hate everyone?* "Hate" sounds so harsh. "Hate" sounds extreme. How do we justify this in light of the fifth commandment to honor our fathers and mothers? Also, as we read in an earlier session, Jesus has commanded us to "love your enemies" (Luke 6:27). Was Jesus now contradicting Himself?

We tend to use "love" and "hate" in an emotional sense, but Scripture uses the words in another way. "Love" can mean to choose something or prefer something; consequently, "hate" can mean to reject something or to prefer something else. In that sense, Jesus calls us to choose Him, to prefer Him above all. It's a statement of comparison. Our love for Jesus is to be so great that, by comparison, our love for others doesn't come close to the love we have for Him.

Jesus wants us to love Him in a way that leads us to lose concern for everything else in our lives—including our own lives! It's a call for every person to "bear his own cross." His disciples and followers knew exactly what that meant: to pick up a cross is to die. Jesus is quite clear about what we must do to be His disciple: we must choose Him over and above everything else in life!

Luke 14:28-33

²⁸ "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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ 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? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Why is counting the cost so important in following Christ?

QUESTION #3

What Jesus had called the crowd to do was no easy task: (1) to love Him so much that all other loves look like hate, and (2) to be willing to die for Him. Jesus knew this would be difficult for many of them, so He cautioned them to think through all that meant. In other words, He called them to count the cost of following Him.

To place Jesus before everybody else in our lives may not set well with others. Family members and friends may not share our radical commitment to Christ, so we must consider what that could cost us. We might experience rejection by those closest to us, as Jesus knew firsthand. He also knew that the rejection would increase and that the cross lay before Him. He knew His disciples would also experience it. So Jesus calls us to count the cost.

Today, throughout our world, persecuted Christians flee their homes because they have chosen Christ and are no longer welcomed by their families as a result. Some have merely been ostracized and ignored by families; others have been killed. It is estimated that one in twelve Christians worldwide experience persecution, including imprisonment, abduction, sexual assault, and death.² All because they choose to follow Jesus.

We also can know blessing in following Jesus, but He does warn us to count the cost. Choosing to follow Jesus is not a lighthearted decision and it should never be treated as such. If you are ready, then you must be willing to give up everything and everyone you know. You must be willing to lay down your own agenda and your own desires—and pick up a cross.

Luke 14:34-35

³⁴“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

In what ways have others been salt in your life and influenced your thirst for God?

QUESTION #4

The Christian life is no place for half-hearted commitment. Half-hearted commitment would be like salt that isn't salty!

Typically, when we think of salt, we think of enhanced flavor. We use salt to make our food taste better. In the days before refrigeration, however, salt was used as a preservative, to keep foods from spoiling. Jesus described His followers as “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13); as such, we are a preserving influence for the kingdom of God.

People have used salt symbolically to represent a covenant between friends. To share a meal with someone was to eat as friends, and salt was a staple at meals. Even today, the Arabic expression, “There is salt between us” describes hospitality that seals friendship.³

When we enter into a relationship with Christ—a covenant based on what Christ has done to bring us to God—we become His salt. What can we do to ensure we remain that strong influence in the world?

- ▶ **Stay in fellowship with Jesus.** Keep your eyes on Him and your mind set in His Word.
- ▶ **Be at peace with one another.** Remember, following Jesus means taking up our cross; when we die to selfishness we can be at peace with each other.
- ▶ **Be in community with other believers.** Community reminds us we are not alone as believers.

Keep going—no matter how hard it gets. Remember the covenant of salt—that covenant of permanent loyalty. It's not just a commitment of *your* loyalty to *God*; it's also *God's* commitment to *you*. He is with you. He loves, He restores, and He strengthens. You *can* keep going.

How can our group help one another maintain a devotion to Christ that influences others for Him?

QUESTION #5



JESUS AND MY FAMILY

Fill in a family tree with your immediate family members, including parents and grandparents. Evaluate whether you can honestly say you love Jesus more.

What does it mean to love Jesus more than your family members?

What does it look like to love Jesus more than your family members?

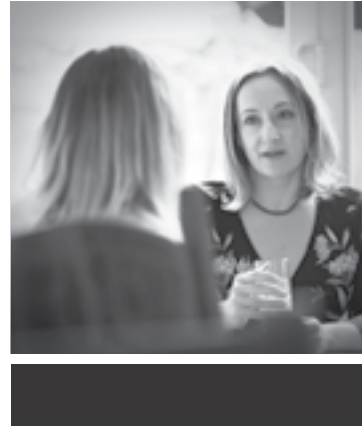
*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your might!"*

—DEUTERONOMY 6:5

LIVE IT OUT

Jesus calls us to do hard things by putting ourselves aside and following Him. What will you do to reflect your commitment to Him? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Evaluate yourself.** Do a self-evaluation. In what areas of your life is compromise evident? If you determine you have not given everything to Christ, pray and make that commitment now.
- ▶ **Influence others.** Determine to let your conversations this week reflect your relationship with Christ. “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:6).
- ▶ **Count the cost.** Get involved in being salt in the community. Invest your time and energy in helping others in your community see the love and grace of Christ in you.



We're not building towers or armies. We're building something so much more important: lives and communities devoted to Christ. Let's be sure to count the cost!

My thoughts

1. Aarian Marshall, “When the British Tried to Build Their Own Eiffel Tower,” *CityLab*, February 25, 2015, <https://www.citylab.com/design/2015/02/when-the-british-tried-to-build-their-own-eiffel-tower/386132/>.

2. opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution.

3. E.B. Pollard, “Covenant of Salt,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 794).