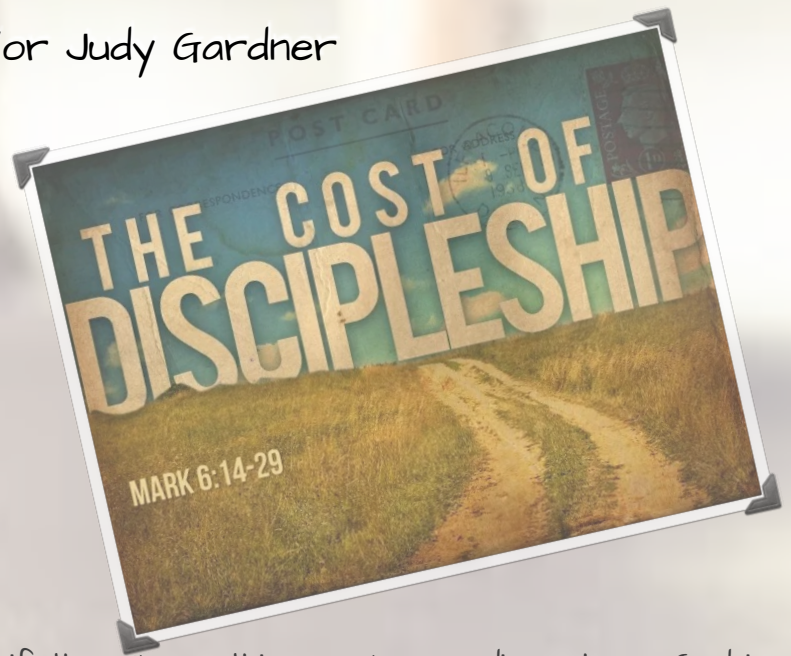


January 19-23, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 2||
The Cost Of Discipleship

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If hey help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to spend some time talking about the cost of discipleship. But in order to understand the cost of discipleship we need to first talk about what a disciple is. A disciple is much more than just a student. The main difference is, a student wants to know what their teacher knows so they can succeed in their chosen field. A disciple not only wants to know what their rabbi knows, they want to become like their rabbi in some way.

If you're a fan of Greek history then maybe you know that Aristotle the philosopher taught Alexander the Great. But Alexander didn't want to become like Aristotle. He just wanted to know what Aristotle knew. But with the rabbi- disciple relationship it was quite different. Disciples followed their rabbis around like puppy dogs. They watched how they walked and tried to walk the same way. They watched how they held their forks while they ate. There are even stories about disciples wanting to go into the bathroom with their rabbis and one account of a student requesting to be allowed to watch the rabbi in bed with his wife (if you know what i mean). The rabbi was said to have refused that request. It's probably why he was still married after that.

When Jesus was leaving this earth to ascend to His throne in Heaven He left these final instructions with His disciples:

Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

You'll notice He didn't say for them to go into all the world and make fans or admirers or even devotees. He says disciples. That's the mandate of the church and that's what Jesus is looking for in each one of us. But what does that mean and how much will that cost us? That's what we'll spend this week trying to get to the bottom of. Maybe today you and I can spend some time reflecting on what a disciple is and whether we would consider ourselves to be one.

Tuesday Reflection: So a disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus but what does that mean? Maybe you've heard the phrase, Grace is free but it aint cheap. Well sometimes we try to live lives as cheaply as possible when it comes to discipleship. But cheap discipleship does a lot harm because it produces fictitious faith. Notice I didn't say it produces weak faith. Weak faith Jesus can work with. In fact He can do a lot with weak faith. But fictitious faith is so destructive- both to the would be disciple and to those on the outside watching that would be disciple. This was already a problem in the first century and so Jesus does quite a bit of teaching on the subject including at the end of Luke chapter 14:

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters- yes, even their own life- such a person cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:25-26 (NIV)

Shocking words from Jesus, right? At least they seem shocking to us. They would have been shocking to the people who were listening to Him too but not for the same reason. We're shocked because Jesus seems to be suggesting that we treat our families terribly. That we

actually despise our parents, our spouse, our children and siblings. But that's not what the people who were listening to Him that day would have thought He was suggesting.

The Jews used the word "hate" in a way we don't. They used the word as an exaggeration for loyalty. Hate in this case would have been heard as Jesus telling them that in order to be His disciple you had to love Him so much that everything else looks like second place. What He's asking is, who gets the final say in your life? Turns out Jesus doesn't just want to be the top of your list- He wants to be the paper your list is written on. Does that make sense? It does to me. Kind of. I'm still trying to come up with a better metaphor than that but for now this is what you get from me.

We might wonder why He wouldn't put family at the top. Well I think He would. At the top of the list that uses God as its paper. Your family should be the most important thing in your life- after Jesus. When I decided to go into ministry full time I told Judy that the church wouldn't come before our family. Some churches try to make loyalty to Jesus and loyalty to a particular congregation the same thing. They are not. Jesus is perfect but churches are made up of flawed, selfish, weak people like you and me and sometimes those flawed, selfish and weak people can make decisions that are nothing like what Jesus would make (have you heard of the Spanish Inquisition or the Crusades?).

I've heard countless stories about preachers interviewing at different churches and being told that they had to put everything behind the needs of the church. That if the question was will my family suffer or will the church suffer then the choice needed to be obvious- your family suffers. Individual congregations of Jesus' church are not on the same level as Jesus. And in my opinion they're not on the same level as family. Family comes first.

Jesus isn't saying to literally hate your family and I'll prove it to you. There's a story in the gospels where a young guy comes to ask Jesus a question- he's referred to as the rich, young ruler and talk about hitting the trifecta. About the only thing missing is good looking but hey I guess you can't have it all:

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"... "You know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

Mark 10:17-20 (NLT)

This guy wants to know what to do to inherit eternal life. Now we often think of eternal life as what begins after we die and that's part of it but eternal life isn't simply a matter of duration- it's also about quality of life. And Jesus intends eternal life to begin here and now on this side of death's door. This young man wants to know how to achieve that and Jesus rattles off several commandments. The commandments He chose out of the 10 commandments are interesting. They are all the horizontal commands. In other words they are all the commands that relate to how we treat one another. The first 4 that He left out are about how we relate to God but Jesus doesn't mention those.

Yet.

But notice the last one Jesus mentions. Honor your father and mother. He tells this kid that part of what is required for “eternal life” is to honor your parents. Doesn’t sound like the same guy who said you need to hate your parents, does it? But it is the same guy. It’s just that here hate doesn’t mean hate. It just means that everything other than Jesus comes second. And if you put Jesus first and then add your family at the top of the list (written on Jesus stationery if that metaphor works for you) then your family will never suffer. In fact if you don’t put Jesus first and try to make your family the most important thing in your life (written on your own personal stationery) then your family will most likely suffer terribly. Because nobody can bear up under that kind of pressure. Psychologists speak in terms of dysfunction, toxic relationships and codependency.

But put Jesus first and “hate” everything else in your life and you will find that everything else falls into place in a way you would never have dreamed was possible. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on what it means to rank our most important roles and relationships on Jesus stationery.

Wednesday Reflection: If the first thing it means to be a disciple of Jesus is to put Him first in your life the second thing it means is to do it every day. Every. Single. Day.

*And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:27 (NIV)*

Somehow Jesus is comparing being a disciple with carrying a cross. That may not seem all that strange to you and me but it would have been cuckoo pants to everybody listening to Jesus. When we think of the cross we think of jewelry, ear rings or a tattoo. The cross is symbol of hope and beauty to us in the 21st century. But not to the people of the first century. To them the cross was a symbol of execution, torture and humiliation. What did Jesus mean that to be His disciple we must carry our cross?

And notice what He doesn’t say. He doesn’t say to admire our cross or to think about our cross or to wear our cross. Carry your cross. What does that even mean? Well He expands a bit further in another place in the book of Luke:

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, 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, you will save it. Luke 9:23-24 (NLT)

To carry your cross means to give up your own way. That’s a hard. At least it is if you’ve ever really tried it. Most of us addicts will tell you that the only reason we have turned over control of our lives to Jesus is because we came to a place where we realized that the situation we found ourselves in was the direct result of our own best thinking. We realized our best thinking was not going to lead to a life that anyone valued- including us. And so we turned over control to this Higher Power and tried to become disciples of Him.

In a way I think that those of us who have never had to struggle with chemical addictions are at a disadvantage when it comes to giving up control. We never were forced to it. It was never a life or death decision for most people. And so it’s much tougher to find the way to surrendering control of our lives to Jesus. But whether you’re an addict like me (recovering addict but still an addict) or not surrendering your life is what it takes to be a disciple of

Jesus. Salvation is free but discipleship will cost you everything. Discipleship isn't adding Jesus to your life- it's handing Jesus your life and saying, "show me the way."

Remember that rich, young ruler guy who was so proud of himself for following all the commands Jesus reeled off? Well it turns out he may have been pretty good at following those horizontal commands (you know the commands governing how we relate to other humans) but there was at least one of the vertical commands (the commands governing how we relate to God) he wasn't so good at following:

Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Mark 10:21-22 (NLT)

Turns out this guy was breaking the first commandment. The one that says, no other gods before Me. Now he wasn't worshiping false idols and dancing around a fire bowing down to a carved statue. But he had made something other than Yahweh his god. And we do this all the time. One of the reformers of the 1500s said that humans are an idol factory. I think whoever that was was right. We will make pleasure or power or success or even relationships our idols. Whatever you put above God becomes your idol. For the rich, young ruler it was money. Jesus knew because He could see into the kid's heart. You and I know it because when Jesus brought it up the guy walked away sad. That was one thing he was not willing to give up.

Now this doesn't mean wealth is bad. Having money in and of itself doesn't make money an idol in our lives. In fact the ability to create wealth is listed as a spiritual gift in Romans chapter 12. Not just to people can have more comfortable lives than those with less but so that these people can make lots of money and give it away extravagantly to bless others and God. We all know those people who trip and when they look down they've found more money. I don't know where I was when that spiritual gift was handed out. Probably down the street getting a sense of humor. No there's nothing wrong with having money but putting it above Jesus turns it into an idol.

This doesn't mean every Christian must sell everything— but it does mean nothing owns you anymore. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on what owns us right now. What have we allowed to take first place in our lives. Are we carrying our cross each and every day or have we abandoned the cross for something that offers the world but will leave us with nothing?

Thursday Reflection: One last thing that being a disciple means is to count the cost. The cost of what? Of being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus was always talking about how we had to give up everything if we were going to be His disciples. In fact He does it so much you'd think He didn't really want many followers. But you'd be wrong- He just wanted to make sure we knew what we were getting ourselves into. So He urges all of us to count the cost:

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'" Luke 14:28-30 (NIV)

Jesus is saying, "think this through. Do you see what it's going to take to be a disciple of mine?" Again, salvation is free but discipleship will cost you everything. He wants all of us to join Him but He knows how destructive and toxic half hearted discipleship is. It's an illusion. It's an illusion to those of us who have tried to practice it and it's disillusioning to those on the outside watching us flounder at it. I firmly believe it's what's at the heart of most of the disgust that people of this world have with those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus.

My dad wasn't a church going guy but I have never seen a better example of the integrity of Jesus lived out in this world than I did in him. But he didn't have much use for half hearted disciples. He told me once that he'd never do business with someone who had a cross or a Jesus anchovy on their yellow pages ad or business cards. Because the only times he had been taken advantage of in a business deal was by people who made a big show of telling him that he could trust them because they were Christians. That's a tragedy. How does it happen?

Half-hearted discipleship.

Ever seen one of those bumper stickers that say, Christians aren't perfect- just forgiven. It's absolutely true. But what most of the people of this world think when see that bumper sticker is, I'll do you dirty if I need to and then I'll smile and say, "hey, Christians aren't perfect- we're just forgiven." It's like our dirty get-out-of-jail-free card.

And it does untold damage to the cause of Jesus in this world. People who fail at being disciples don't fail because discipleship is too hard. They fail because they're trying to follow Jesus without surrounding everything to Him. It just doesn't work. And Jesus wants you to know that up front. So He tells us to count the cost. That's exactly what He does with that rich, young ruler. He shows that kid exactly what it means to be His disciple. And the kid wasn't willing to pay that cost. What a sad story. Have you ever stopped and thought about what that guy missed out on? He would have seen miracles. He would have seen the dead raised to life. And he would have had a front row seat to the resurrection of Jesus. Not to mention the beginnings of the church. And he could've spent every day with Jesus.

But would I have made a different choice? I'd like to think so. But I can't guarantee it. We'll finish up tomorrow looking at what Jesus says to His disciples after the kid walks away sad but for today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on the cost of discipleship. Am I willing to pay that cost?

Friday Reflection: We saw yesterday that Jesus got the rich, young ruler to count the cost of following Him before allowing him to join the rest of the disciples. It turns out there's a big difference between a disciple of Jesus and those of us who are simply admirers or fans of Jesus. After the young man walks away because he's not willing to give up his wealth this happens:

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God." Mark 10:23-27 (NLT)

Why were the disciples so shocked by Jesus' words? Because they believed that the rich had wealth because they were doing everything right and God was blessing them for it. It was the world view at the time. It still is. And it's a world view that Jesus spends a lot of time trying to show us how wrong it is.

Now when Jesus says that bit about it being easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter into the Kingdom of God He's not being metaphorical. At least I don't think He was. When I was a kid I heard so many preachers talking about a gate in Jerusalem's walls that was called the eye of the needle. Supposedly this gate was too short for a camel to walk through carrying any cargo on its back. So if you wanted to take your camel through the eye of the needle gate, so the story goes, you had to unload everything you were carrying and lead the camel through and then carry all your possessions and reload your camel before continuing on. It's a great little illustration for this story. The problem is there's zero archaeological evidence that there was ever a gate like that in Jerusalem (or anywhere else for that matter) called the eye of the needle gate.

Even so it's a pretty good metaphor. But like I said, I don't think Jesus was being metaphorical. I think He was being quite literal. That is indeed easier to put a camel through the literal eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. But that means it's impossible right? Yes. For humans. And if you want to get right down to it it's impossible for all of us no matter how much (or how little) money you may (or may not) have. I think that's the point. With humans it's impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible when God is involved.

And so no matter what your "cross" may be. Whatever that thing is that you're not sure if you can let go and hand over to Jesus know this- it may feel impossible but it's not. God is in the habit of making the impossible possible. And He finishes up His teaching on discipleship with these words:

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.
Luke 14:34-35 (NIV)

What is He talking about? Did He change the subject? Salt losing its saltiness? Is that a thing? I mean we've got some salt shakers in the kitchen cupboards at church that have been up there since I got here 27 years ago. Maybe one of them is what Jimmy Buffett has been singing about all these years, who knows? Last weekend during men's breakfast I wanted some salt so I went in there and grabbed one of those shakers of salt and never once wondered if it had lost its saltiness. And guess what? It hadn't. But that's because our salt is almost 100% sodium chloride. It doesn't really lose its saltiness.

But in the first century salt did lose its saltiness. Salt was not nearly as refined as it is today. It was mainly from the dead sea in that part of the world and it was mixed with lots of other minerals. And if you left it sitting around too long then yes, the sodium chloride did leach out of it and became worthless.

And salt in the first Century wasn't mainly about flavor. It was mainly used as a preservative. In a world where there were no preservatives or antibiotics or refrigeration decay was the

great enemy of humankind. Salt was the only thing that they knew of that could stop that decay. They would rub it in wounds to keep them from festering. They would rub it on meat to preserve it, and they would even sprinkle it on their leafy greens not so that they tasted better but so that they wouldn't go bad as quickly. That's why to this day we call a bowl with a bunch of leafy greens in it salad.

So yeah, salt could go bad and lose its saltiness in the first century. And Jesus warns us not to let that happen in our lives either. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the Earth. I don't think he was mainly suggesting that we are the flavor of this world – I think he was suggesting that we are the thing that are to help slow the process of decay in the lives of other humans. But half hearted discipleship will absolutely rob us of our saltiness. Jesus is saying, don't let this happen to you.

So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on how salty we are. And no, I don't mean salty the way that our culture defines salty – let's go with Jesus's definition for the purposes of our reflections for today shall we? Are we salty disciples or have we lost everything that it means to be a preservative in this world that is decaying so quickly?