

In a recent article in Christianity Century there is a report of a study conducted with today's Christian youth. This story entitled "Faith, Nice and Easy" was recently picked up by CNN and reported. The study looked at the faith of teenagers today. What was found is that Christianity has been traded for what the author describes as Moral Therapeutic Deism. They call it MTD. They concluded that if the teens wrote a creed it would look like this:

A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.

God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible
And by most religions.

The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself.

God is not involved in my life except when I need God to solve a problem.

Good people go to heaven when they die.

The researchers discovered that these teens did not arrive at this place on their own but are simply believing what they have been taught by protestant churches in America. In other words the teens believe this is Christianity because that is what the parents believe and have taught by their actions and words.

What is wrong with this creed? Nothing if you want to raise good, nice and moral people. But don't call it Christianity. Don't call it being a follower of Jesus. We are teaching the next generation a bland, and banal form of Christianity.

Compare this creed to the words of Jesus. God does not simply watch over the world but has come in Jesus to have a relationship with you. God wants people to follow Jesus with a transformation of character not simply be nice. While the word says feel good about yourself and be happy, Jesus say deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me. God is not just a benevolent good to be consumed when we need it, but the Creator God who deserves our worship. Good people do not go to heaven. People who have realized that they are sinners and have asked God to forgive them and have received that forgiveness through Jesus Christ go to heaven.

Has your Christianity become too nice and easy? Is there anything more? Is there something worth your life? Jesus says yes. Come and follow me. Choose Jesus above all others, make a sacrifice to follow and make a commitment that will last a life time. I have never known a Christian who has made this decision who gets to the end of life and said it was not worth it. Instead those who follow Jesus their whole life with their lives come to the end of life and say if I had one hundred lives to live I would live them with Jesus. Answer to life question #1: Is there anything worth my life? Yes, Jesus is worth your life and mine.



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Is There Anything Worth My life? The Cost of Discipleship Luke 14: 25-35 Dr. Jeff Roberts

The Declaration of Independence continues to be one of the most influential documents ever penned by men. Those founding fathers after years of conflict and protest with Great Britain came to a place of decision making in the spring and summer of 1776. They came to a place where they had to draw a line in the sand and say this is where we stand and we can do nothing else. This great document begins with the declaration that there are certain rights and moments in history that require an action. The next part is probably the most famous part and that is the part that appeals to God given rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Continuing that thought, that it is the right of individuals to establish governments that pursue such rights when the governed are no longer given such rights by their government. Those are the famous parts of this declaration but the declaration ends with probably the most sobering words.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

With reliance on divine providence and protection we pledge our lives, fortunes and honor. This was more than mere words. Although the history of these men is still work of scholars, there is no doubt that some died as a result of the war. Some were captured and others lost sons in the war. Several lost their fortunes. What is definitely unknown was the future when these men made this declaration. They did not know how the war would turn out. They were taking a great act to become traitors of their government.

They believed that this act was worth their lives. However, they are not the only ones who discovered that there are some things worth our very lives.

The apostles and early disciples knew what it meant to discover something that was worth their lives. When Jesus called them to come and follow him it required a major adjustment in their lives. They left fortune, family and stability. Many of them were martyred after Jesus death and resurrection. The trajectory of their lives changed the day they came to faith that Jesus was the Son of God and called them to follow.

In the book of Hebrews in chapter 11 we find what we call the Hall of Fame of Faith. The writer takes us on a history of all the great names of the faith in God. There is Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Gideon, Samuel, Sampson, Barak and Rahab the spy. All of these are spoken of in terms of how God delivered them and used their lives. Their names became synonymous with God's care and God's presence. Yet, that is not how this chapter ends. It ends in a more solemn reflection. In verse 35 and following that, describes some of the price of following God.

Listen to these words:

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so

that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷They were stoned^U; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that for all the stories of glory in following Christ there are also stories of individuals who went away silently into the history of this word and the history of this faith who faced great tragedy, pain and difficulty who followed Christ. Both are celebrated in the Hall of Fame of Faith. Both those who were recognized and both that were forgotten are all who realized that there is something worth our lives.

We live in a culture that does not make commitments. We really have lost the concept of commitment and cost. We are generally not joiners. Most community organizations struggle in getting new members to join. Church's have a hard time getting joiners, we have participants but to make a decision to make a commitment is something that many choose not to do. In our marriages we lack the understanding of commitment. A commitment that truly is through good and bad, sickness and health and poverty and wealth. In our vocations employers are not loyal to employees and employees lack commitment to employer.

Is there anything really worth your life? That is our question today. Of course I want to set forth that Jesus tells us that there is something worth our life. What is really worth our lives is to follow Jesus with all of our hearts. In our text we are told that there were crowds following Jesus and it is to these crowds who are following Jesus he spoke these words of the cost of discipleship. These words are not spoken to an inner circle of super followers. On the contrary they are spoken to all those who have been attracted to Jesus. These hard words are spoken to the crowds. There were many who were attracted to Jesus. This passage comes right after Jesus has instructed his followers to go out and invite all those who had been left out. This teaching comes on the heels of the parable of the Great Banquet which is the reminder that many who were invited had excuses not to follow and that God had made a place for all. Everyone was invited to follow Jesus but just when you thought it was a simple "just show up and follow," Jesus reminds them that if they are going to follow there is

going to be a cost. Jesus gives us a statement of the cost of discipleship that really includes three ideas. There is loyalty, sacrifice and there is commitment. Jesus gives us three instructions for us to consider if we would be a follower of Jesus.

First there is the demand of loyalty. Jesus says if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters and yes even his own life he cannot be my disciple. Now these are difficult words. They are difficult because they do not say if you don't put me first then you are not the kind of follower I would like for you to be. Instead Jesus says if there is not this sense of loyalty to me you cannot be my disciple. It is an impossibility to truly follow Jesus and have our loyalty to someone else, some other thing, or as one writer puts it to our unredeemed desires.

We think such a demand seems unreasonable and how can Jesus ask us to hate our family. It is such a strong word, however we must place this in Jesus culture and in the use of language of Jesus day. Those who first heard these words understood its meaning. The word does not mean hate as we think of hate. It does not mean to despise our family. The phrase suggests that total and absolute abandonment from loyalty and attachment to another.

Here is what this means in practical terms. The follower of Jesus understands that the love of Jesus means that all other loves of life are lesser loves. It does not mean we do not love our family but it means that even our most important relationships pale next to our relationship to Christ. This also suggests that in moments of choice the disciple chooses loyalty to Christ.

"I have never been especially patriotic. I've traveled too much overseas, I guess, and have seen from afar the arrogance and insensitivity of the United States," wrote Philip Yancey in Christianity Today (October 23, 2001).

"September 11 changed my attitude. I choked up when the Congress sang 'God Bless America,' and when the Buckingham Palace guard played the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' and when firemen told corny stories about their fallen comrades, and when a solitary bagpiper played 'Amazing Grace' in Union Square, and when hundreds of New Yorkers walked around dazed with photos of their missing loved ones, sheltering candle flames in their cupped hands, and when Dan Rather had to be comforted by David Letterman of all people. I felt a sudden surge of loyalty and unity with my country that was new to me. Scott Simon put words to it in a National Public Radio editorial after the WTC attacks. Patriotism is not based on a blind belief that the United States has no need to change, he said. God knows we need to change in many ways. Our love for America rests on the

belief that the changes needed are more likely to occur here than anywhere else in the world."

What is wonderful about loving Jesus and our other loves becoming less, is that loving Jesus makes these other relationships more meaningful. When we love Jesus the most we become better children, better parents, better spouses and better friends. When we place Jesus first then these other relationships are deepened.

The issue is that of loyalty. Loyalty to Jesus is not based on the fickle wants of our consumer attitude. We are not customers of Jesus, who like Starbucks or Microsoft, seeks to create a better consumer experience for us so we will remain loyal. Loyalty to Jesus is based on who God is and who Jesus is.

In 1930 William Temple preached at the opening of the seventh Lambeth Conference. This is part of what he said:

While we deliberate, God reigns; when we decide wisely, God reigns; when we decide foolishly, God reigns; when we serve God in humble loyalty, God reigns; when we serve God self-assertively, God reigns; when we rebel and seek to withhold our service, God reigns - the Alpha and the Omega, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

A second word is sacrifice. Jesus says we must hate even our own lives and we must carry our own cross. The cross was a symbol of suffering and hardship. There were many who were called to die for Christ but here the term is different. It is to carry the cross. It is the sense of a continued life of sacrifice. Jesus died on the cross as an act of selfless love. He made a sacrifice. In the same way to carry our own cross is to make a sacrifice.

One scholar says that this means when we are faced with the words of Jesus and our own selfish desires we choose to follow the words of Jesus and the example of Jesus.

I wonder sometimes if I have ever made a true sacrifice. In regards to money I give my tithes. Each and every month one tenth of my salary and Robin's salary is given to our church for ministry. Every now and then I offer an additional offering of money whether it is for missions, benevolence or North Raleigh Ministry. I have discovered that such a discipline helps me to have a more generous heart, but I am not sure I would call it sacrifice. It has been a

long time since I denied myself something so I could give financially to the church.

In regards to time, I have made some adjustments to my schedule. I attend meetings, perform weddings and funerals on days that I would like to be with my family, but it is my job, so I am not sure I would call it sacrifice.

In regards to behavior, I have made some changes in my life because I want to be pleasing to Christ but did it require a sacrifice. I think about the good people of the church in Belize where we served. Where men stopped their business for a week so they could be at Vacation Bible School. I think about those who sacrifice time and energy beyond belief to minister to a poor community. I am not sure I understand sacrifice.

How about you? Have you ever made a sacrifice to follow Jesus? How about financially? Do you tithe as an individual or family? You say well I would have to give up this or that to tithe to the church. What about sacrifice? How about time? I would have to give up this activity I love to participate in this ministry or to be regular in worship. What about sacrifice? What about my lifestyle? Are you willing to make some changes because Jesus wants more for your life? To follow Jesus requires a sacrifice.

The final word is commitment. Jesus tells two parables about a man who would count the cost before building a tower and a King who would count the cost before he went to war. The cost of discipleship is so great that it requires a reflection of can I do this. Can I, as we spoke of two weeks ago, finish my race of discipleship.

One scholar writes discipleship is not a volunteer periodic commitment that comes and goes on our terms and our convenience. To follow Jesus requires a commitment to the end of life. To be a follower of Jesus means that we follow not only in this time of our lives but through the transition of life to the end of life. Were you more devoted to Christ when you were a youth? Were you more devoted to Christ when you were single? Were you more devoted to Christ before you had the responsibility of children? Were you more devoted to Christ before you became an empty nester and did not worry about raising your children in church? Were you more devoted to Christ when you had the routine of work but now in retirement you have more time to devote to the things you want to do and the things you love more than Christ and his church? To follow Jesus is a commitment. It is to be found faithful, faithful to the end.