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Making Sacrifices

The Cost of Discipleship



"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." 2 TIMOTHY 3:12



Making Sacrifices

The Cost of Discipleship

LEADER'S GUIDE

by
Drew Gordon



Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cover photo: The Image Bank

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How to Use This Guide

Discover Life is a small group outreach Bible study ministry. It gives spiritually mature members of the church a way to reach out to friends, relatives, neighbors, work associates, and others who need to come to Christ, grow spiritually in Christ, and enjoy the fellowship of the body of Christ.

Following are ten strategy guidelines to keep in mind when organizing Discover Life groups.

- 1. Meet at times that fit people's schedules.** Don't expect all the people you want to reach to come together at the same time or on the same day. Personal schedules will vary a great deal. A church that wants to reach many people should have groups meeting in the morning, in the evening, on Saturday, at lunchtime, and even on Sunday.
- 2. Lead the groups with a team of at least two.** Make sure you have leadership depth and strength. Group leaders are busy people and do not have much available time. Work and family activities usually take precedence over Bible study. Leadership will be stronger and the group more likely to succeed with a leadership team. Leaders working together can share the load of leadership, give each other mutual support, cover for each other, and recruit from their acquaintances.
- 3. Meet at convenient, nonthreatening places.** People who don't go to church will feel more comfortable in a familiar environment such as a restaurant, boardroom, or conference room than in a church. Try to meet in "neutral territory" where people will feel comfortable.
- 4. Invite prospective members for a definite, short-term period.** Many people are wary of long-term commitments. After the first series of lessons is complete, take a break and then invite them again for another series. Keep repeating this as long as members are interested. Discover Life material is designed for short-term studies.
- 5. Require no advance homework or prior knowledge of the Bible.** Requiring homework will build a cycle of defeat into participants. Busy people who are not able to prepare will stay home rather than risk embarrassment. To avoid this, do not make advance assignments. Make it clear that the group will start fresh with the material at the beginning of each meeting.

Tear the lesson pages out of the study guides and hand them out as single sheets at the beginning of the meeting. Begin with the approach question (the first question) to warm members up to the subject. Read the first Bible passage and then allow a brief silent study time so members can get oriented to the material and prepare to answer the first inductive questions. AfterWord provides optional material after the lesson.

Be careful not to assume members' prior knowledge of the Bible. Those without a church background will soon feel left out of any discussion that draws on prior knowledge. Stick with the passage at hand and relate it to life. In this way everybody is on the same level.

- 6. Recruit by personally inviting friends and acquaintances.** Very few people come to a group through newspaper ads, posters, or flyer announcements. The most successful invitation is a personal one from a friend or acquaintance who offers to take that person to the group meeting.
- 7. Put a lot of effort into building relationships.** The concern of those who come will not be "How much can I learn here?" but "How well am I accepted as a member of this group?" They will not so much ask "Is this true?" as "How does this group make me feel?" Respond to their concern by reaching out to them and becoming a channel of Christ's love to them. Invest time and energy before, after, and between meetings; get to know those who come. Good meetings are not enough; you need growing relationships too.
- 8. Use appropriate materials.** Most people are used to dealing with letter-size, black-on-white pages. Discover Life material is designed with this in mind. Including the Bible passage as part of the lesson gives nonchurched people, who may not want to be seen carrying a Bible, the option of carrying a pad holder in which they can keep the single-sheet lessons. Including the Bible passage also avoids embarrassing those who do not know their way around the Bible, and it gives everyone a common version to work from.
- 9. Help group members discover truths from the Bible for themselves.** People don't like to be told what to think. They prefer to make up their minds after examining the evidence. They are also more likely to believe what they discover for themselves. The inductive questions in the Discover Life lessons make it possible for group members to discover for themselves what the Bible says. The leader's material encourages the leader to keep asking questions as the group moves more deeply into the passage and applies the truth to their lives.
- 10. Make sure that Bible truths are related to life.** When studying the Bible, people are usually concerned about knowing what it means for their life. They tend to lose interest in an abstract discussion. To help keep the discussions life-oriented, we have included a number of application questions in the leader's guide.

Optional Study Elements

Depending on the goals and makeup of your group, the Optional Prayer Time and Optional Accountability Question may be incorporated into your Bible study.

These two elements are for establishing a more relational dynamic in your group.

Optional Prayer Time. In the leader guide, each session includes a suggested format for group sharing and prayer. Be sure you create an environment where individuals don't feel forced to share prayer requests or to pray aloud. Never ask someone to pray without checking first. You may experiment to find an approach that works best for you. In some cases you may ask individuals to pair off to pray. If you meet in a public place such as a restaurant, you may want to distribute index cards on which group members can write their prayer items and then have members swap cards for individual prayer throughout the week.

Optional Accountability Question. For spiritual growth to occur, it is essential that group members apply lessons learned to their own lives. That is the purpose of the Optional Accountability Question. Don't feel that you must use the suggested question if one of your own better fits your group. However, accountability suggests follow-up. There are several ways you might follow up on the Accountability Question. One is to have individuals write their accountability issue for the week on an index card and hand it to the leader. The next time you meet, these cards are distributed to the group members, who pair off for a few minutes to discuss how things went. Another approach is for each group member to hand the card to another individual. The next week those two will pair up to share for a few minutes.

And Finally

Whether you are leading a group in your workplace, in your home, or in another setting, the following guidelines should assist you in your leadership role.

1. Pray. Nothing will prepare you for leadership more than prayer. Pray for God's direction in making organizational decisions. Pray for the Holy Spirit's direction in whom to invite and for a positive response from those invited. Pray faithfully for group members, and pray for your eyes to be opened to the truths in God's Word and how those truths can best be communicated to your small group. Remember: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world ever dreamed of."

2. Prepare. First, **prepare yourself.** The leader's guide for each discussion is thorough and reinforces the discovery method of Bible study. We suggest highlighting key phrases or questions for easy reference as you prepare. Take your leader's guide with you to the group and be relaxed and informal about using it while you are leading. The perforated discussion copies, located in the study guides, are to be removed and given to group members each week. If you freely show you have extra help in preparing for the discussion, your group members may dare to ask their questions more readily. They'll see it's not that you're smart and they're ignorant, or that the discussion is just an unguided free-for-all, but that it is planned and focused. Be sure you focus on the discussion element, rather than become a teacher with the "answer book."

Second, **prepare your group.** State the ground rules before you begin the group. You may need to repeat them as new members join. This will help group members know how the discussion will proceed and what

will be expected of them. Here are some basic guidelines:

- We're here to see what the Bible has to say, not to argue opinions.
- No previous experience in studying the Bible is needed.
- This discussion will not require homework or outside preparation.
- Respect the confidentiality of the group and affirm each group member. "What we say here must stay here."

3. Persevere. It takes time to build relationships. The Holy Spirit will already have been at work in some of your group members, and they will respond eagerly. Others will be wary. Still others may be in such pain, they'll come because they are desperate. Accept the people God gives you—unconditionally. Often God's timetable is not the same as ours, but be confident that God will use your efforts. Modeling Christ's love may be the most important thing you do. Relax and watch the Spirit work!

Introduction

Since I was always tall for my age, people assumed I'd be a natural at basketball. I loved the sport. But at age sixteen, I was a gawky giant who could scarcely jump and whose reactions were slow as molasses. I had little experience and a lot to learn—much of it learned from the bench.

When the new coach arrived my junior year of high school, everything changed. He taught the fundamentals to everyone—from grade schoolers to seniors. And he worked us hard—a lot of three-and-a-half-hour practices for me, and basketball became a year-round sport. He was constantly testing us, stretching us, measuring our progress.

Without the quickness and natural ability of many other players, every practice was a challenge for me. It was a battle of me against myself, to see whether I would continue or give up. But if I was going to play the game, I wanted to be the best, and I wanted our team to win.

We did win. By the following year we were district champions and ranked in the top ten teams in the state. Three years later the coach took our high school to the state title with a perfect record of 30-0.

Though my basketball journey was grueling, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. In fact, my college coaches were much less rigorous, and it made me angry! I wanted my team to be the best, if we were going to play at all.

I'm not sure, then, why the fact that the Christian life involves suffering came as such a shock. But this verse is in the Bible, and there is no escaping it: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). The more that verse bothered my conscience, the more passages I found that repeated the same message. Suffering, trials, and persecution in the Christian life are normal!

Since that is the case, I wanted to find out more. I knew that God's way is always best, and so studying more about this subject would help me as I prepared for the long season ahead. I'm old enough to know that in order to reach a goal in life you must make sacrifices. I want my sacrifices to be for a goal that matters—now and for all time. Join me, won't you?

—Drew Gordon
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Sacrifice in Moderation?

Lesson 1

1. Have you ever won a championship?

What sorts of things did your coach require of you in your training? Did you ever question the training regimen?

What gave you the edge over the competition?

Transitional Comment

If the goal is something our society prizes—fame, fortune, an Olympic medal, a high government position—most people will justify any amount of effort and sacrifice to achieve that goal. We're going to look at how much sacrifice was required of people in several passages from the Bible.

2. Luke 5:9-11

⁹For [Simon Peter] and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon,¹¹"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Introductory Comment

When Jesus was just beginning his earthly ministry, he was teaching a crowd one day from a boat just off shore. That boat belonged to Simon—better known as Peter. After speaking, Jesus performed a miracle that resulted in a huge catch of fish. The night before, the fishermen could not catch a single fish in that area. The response of Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen is striking.

Questions

- Why do you think the fishermen were afraid?
- How radical was Jesus' directive? How did his direction run parallel with their current occupation?
- What might be the consequences of leaving everything behind?

Helpful Note

- *left everything.* This phrase shows just how committed they were to making this change despite not knowing what lay ahead. Reading this passage helps to set the stage for Simon Peter's statement in Matthew 19:27.

3. Matthew 19:16-30

¹⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

¹⁸"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony,¹⁹honor your father and mother' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁰"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²⁷Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

²⁸Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Introductory Comment

Here are some strong indications that the sacrifices and rewards Jesus is talking about are different from those we are used to seeing.

Questions

- How would you describe the man who approached Jesus?

He already had riches and position; what did he want that he hadn't found a way to obtain?

He knew his riches couldn't buy eternal life; was he comfortable that his good works had gained eternal life?

- What did Jesus say was the key to this man's quest?

What two parts were there to this solution?

How much sacrifice would this require of the rich young ruler?

c. What was the man's response upon hearing the answer to his intensive search?

Which was more important to him, eternal life or the things he owned?

d. What was the disciples' response to this incident?

Do people today think that being rich or having the right position or doing certain good deeds will help them get to heaven?

How were the rich man and the disciples focusing on the wrong thing?

e. What did the disciples sacrifice? What did Jesus say other people had sacrificed?

How significant are those sacrifices?

Will Jesus reward those who sacrifice everything to follow him? How?

Helpful Notes

- *follow me.* The sacrifice required is always in the context of the purpose of that sacrifice—following Jesus. If doing good deeds were enough to inherit eternal life, the rich man might have qualified. But instead, eternal life comes from the Person we follow—Jesus Christ—and our level of sacrifice for him is evidence of the amount of trust we have in him. We will focus on this point further in the next lesson (Phil. 3:7-9).
- *the eye of a needle.* Interpretations differ about whether Jesus is making a specific reference (such as to a narrow gate in the wall around Jerusalem) or a general reference (the way we would naturally understand the words). Either way, it is obvious from the disciples' response that this example seemed impossible.
- *twelve tribes of Israel.* This sentence could have a couple of applications. First, when Jesus was resurrected he would sit at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, and from there send his Holy Spirit. The twelve apostles, empowered by that Spirit, became the leaders of Christ's church, and taught good news to, and also judged, the twelve tribes of Israel. In a wider sense, however, the Bible promises that believers will one day rule the earth, and the twelve tribes of Israel represent all God's spiritual children (see Rom. 2:28-29; Rev. 7:4).
- *many who are last will be first.* This statement summarizes the entire lesson. In God's kingdom things are radically different from the way people naturally think. This is illustrated further in Jesus' parable that follows our text (Matt. 20:1-6).

4. Luke 14:25-35

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who

sees it will ridicule him,³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

³¹"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

³⁴"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Introductory Comment

In these words Jesus makes clear that the sacrifices demanded of the disciples and of the rich young man also apply to us.

Questions

a. What examples show the length to which this commitment goes?

How does the context show that "hate" doesn't mean "without love"?

Did Jesus become popular by telling people what they wanted to hear?

b. Retell the "tower" illustration in terms of a big building project someone might undertake today.

c. Retell the "kings" illustration in contemporary terms.

What do the "tower" illustration and the "kings" illustration have in common?

d. How might verses 33-34 relate to the two illustrations?

What is the price of following Jesus?

Is a moderate amount of sacrifice acceptable to Jesus?

Helpful Notes

- *hate his father and mother.* Jesus loved his own mother very much, as evidenced by his dying request (John 19:26-27). The point here is that following Jesus must be the first priority, and everything else is secondary by comparison.

- *carry his cross and follow me.* Again Jesus connects a commitment to him with total sacrifice—like that of being killed on a cross. This will be covered in more detail in the next lesson.

- *salt.* Used not only to enhance the flavor of food but also as a food preservative. Just as salt is good only as long as it retains its potency, so believers are valuable in the kingdom only as they demonstrate God's power and not their own.

5. Summary

- a. Almost everyone says they want to go to heaven. Based on your experience, what percentage of

those would you guess have really counted the cost of getting there?

- b. What is the cost of following Jesus?**
- c. When should a person consider the cost of following Jesus?**

Main Ideas

- Jesus taught about life and eternity in a way that astonished people and made them rethink their understanding of religion and following God.
- How much must one be prepared to give up to follow Jesus? A true follower has only one answer: everything.
- The importance of the decision requires a sober and careful consideration of costs and consequences.

Good News

The way of eternal life is clearly set before us, and our lack of money or fame or position is not a barrier to heaven.

Optional Prayer Time

Close your study time by leading in a brief prayer yourself. Ask that God would help each person in the study this week as each considers the cost of following Jesus—and the cost of not following him.

Optional Accountability Question

We've talked a lot about the high cost of following Jesus. What would be some costs for you if you chose not to follow Jesus?

You might wish to explain to your group that, as we go through these studies together, things shared in the group should be kept in the group, unless permission is given to do otherwise.

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—Drew Gordon
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Sacrifice in Moderation?

Lesson 1

Luke 5:9-11

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Then Jesus said to Simon,
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³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

Luke 14:25-35

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Questions

1. **Luke 5:9-11**
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 - b. How radical was Jesus' directive? How did his direction run parallel with their current occupation?
 - c. What might be the consequences of leaving everything behind?
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4. **Summary**
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 - b. What is the cost of following Jesus?
 - c. When should a person consider the cost of following Jesus?

afterWord

Planning for the Trip

Imagine your telephone rings one day and a pleasant voice says, "I'm a representative of Carol Joy Enterprises, and do you remember entering a drawing for a month-long, all-expenses-paid vacation to the English countryside? Guess what—you're the winner!"

"Come to our offices tomorrow at 11 o'clock, and we'll give you the details," the representative says. That night you can hardly sleep. A free vacation!

The next morning you sit across the desk from the woman.

"Okay, on May 17, you have a 7:40 p.m. flight out of Kennedy airport, so you'll need to be there by 5:30," she says.

"Kennedy airport?" you ask with a frown. "I don't like Kennedy. It's really hard to get there from where I live, especially in rush hour. I thought I was getting a free vacation in England."

"Yes. It all starts by catching a flight from Kennedy," she replies. "You'll have to wait in several lines and have your luggage checked and show your passport, and then you'll be flying all night to London."

"I don't like the sound of this," you complain. "What if the plane goes down in the ocean?"

The woman rolls her eyes. "Look, it's not going to go down."

"Well, I get nervous in an airplane."

She ignores you. "And then when you get to Heathrow airport in London—"

"Wait a minute! You said I was going to the English countryside."

"Yes, well, first you have to stand in line at the customs checkpoint. When you finally get to the front, they'll ask you some questions and stamp your passport. Then you'll have to get your luggage and haul it to the bus, which will take you into the city to catch the train. It's a three-hour train ride to your hotel."

You're getting irritated. "I don't want to do all that," you insist. "I just want to go straight to the little English village."

At this point the woman is ready to disqualify you and pick another winner!

We have all met Christians who expect their trip to heaven to be one smooth ride from the time they accepted Christ straight to the pearly gates. . . . [However], trouble breaks loose in their lives, and all of a sudden they're crying, "Where is God? Nobody told me this was going to happen."

—JIM CYMBALA IN LEADERSHIP

What Self-Denial Isn't

Self-denial has its place in a Christian's life, but God doesn't ask you to choose what is most painful to you. If you followed this path you would soon ruin your health, reputation, business, and friendship.

Self-denial consists of bearing patiently all those things that God allows to pass into your life. If you don't refuse anything that comes in God's order, you are tasting of the cross of Jesus Christ.

—SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR FRANÇOIS FÉNELON

A World Without Trouble

What kind of world would it be if Christians never got sick? If they never fell? Never got burned? Never got into auto accidents? How long would it take for the insurance companies to figure out what was going on?

And how long would it take for other people to catch on? Before long we would have a religion of instant gratification, obvious to everyone. Christians would never go bankrupt. Their kids would never use drugs or run away from home. Their loved ones would never suffer. Do you know what would happen? You would destroy faith. You would destroy character. Religion would become a crass commercial venture (which it already is, for some). Is that what we want?

"No," we say. "I guess not. I guess what I want is not that God would act that way for everyone, all the time. I just want him to do it for me." How many times a day would God hear that pitiful, self-centered appeal? "Just for me, Lord. Just for my children. Just for my friends." Is that what we want? A world that runs on selfishness?

—D. JAMES KENNEDY IN TURN IT TO GOLD (SERVANT)

Don't Be Deceived

The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace. But those who try to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves.

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER IN THE COST OF DISCIPLESHP (MACMILLAN)

Giving Away: A Radical Idea

In *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*, author D. J. Waldie observes that the biggest drawback to living alone is having nobody to forgive. It is not that you don't get certain things—companionship, sex, somebody to share the chores—it is that you don't give to them. You are deprived of a great opportunity: to learn to love your neighbor as yourself.

This was a radical notion in Christ's time; it is radical now. It will always be radical because it is the hardest way, the most illogical way, the "unfairest" way—and the only way that can grant us the peace that passes all understanding.

In a way I can see only dimly, marriage is causing me to be freer with my time, my money, my affections. It is changing my heart, one molecule at a time, from stone to flesh. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, it is giving me the opportunity to die to myself.

—HEATHER KING IN CONTEXT (FEB. 15, 1999)