

Sometimes Less Is Best

Heading the call of Christ to a life of service to others may at first seem like a daunting task. The story of the Rich Young Ruler comes to mind. In today's society, exactly how does one go about selling one's possessions, giving the proceeds to the poor, and following Christ? What do we live on after that? Who pays the mortgage? How do we save for retirement? How do we get our kids through college? And so on. What is meant by "taking up a cross daily" and following Christ? Exactly what is involved in the rejection of material possessions and serving God instead? Is the hatred of materialism a requirement for Christian discipleship? Is physical pain and suffering the price we must pay in order to be true disciples of Christ?

The cost of discipleship was generally much higher during the latter days of Jesus' earthly ministry and, to a lesser extent, during the formation of the early Church in the days leading up to and immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Many of the early Christians were persecuted for their faith.

In today's society, especially in countries where there is freedom of religion, the cost of discipleship does not normally include physical suffering and death. But, you might ask, are we still required to "sell our possessions" and share them with people in need? My answer would be "yes," but there are no hard and fast rules.

To me, following Christ and becoming like Christ is a journey, not a single "conversion" event. Our conversion to Christ should not be regarded as a "culmination" but instead as a "beginning." Our transformation into the likeness of Christ is an ages-long process that will not actually culminate until the end of the ages. If you believe, as I do, that the ages will never technically end, and that our life in Christ is of infinite duration, then our "growing into Christ" will continue for all eternity. Infinity is an intriguing concept. No matter how long or big we envision it to be, there is always time and room for more.

God does not judge us negatively for not measuring up to impossible standards of perfection. He loves us unconditionally, forgives us when we fall, picks us up, dusts the dirt off, and sets us on our way again towards our high calling to become like Christ. Even the Apostle Paul admitted that he had not yet achieved this goal (Philippians 3:13). There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve God's unconditional love and support. We serve God out of love and gratitude, not out of fear or a sense of obligation. We should be loving others and helping people in need because it is our nature to do so. Serving God in this way has become a source of personal joy and happiness for us.

I know this is counterintuitive, but thinking little might be better than thinking big. Less is sometimes best. BIG things can happen to those who take many LITTLE steps. When we try to do too much all at once, we set ourselves up for discouragement and failure. It's OK to start with tiny steps. God is not your judge. He is your Savior. He is not your enemy. He is your friend. He is not your critic. He is your helper. He's, like, the greatest Dad ever.

If you're not ready to give away all of your possessions (and who is?) then start with a small gift to someone in need. Do a small task for someone who could use your help. If you can't give 10%, start with 1%. Believe it or not, there's no hard and fast rule. Those rules went out with the rest of the Old Testament Law. Christ has freed us from all demands of the Law. Our relationship with God is based on Grace, which literally means "undeserved love."