

"A Costly Command"

Not a Fan – part #3 – based on the book by Kyle Idleman

Luke 14:25-35

[55-title slide] *Welcome*

Prayer

For the past several weeks, we've been talking about the difference between being a fan of Jesus and following Jesus. I've based these messages on a book called Not a Fan by Pastor Kyle Idleman. The basic premise is, Jesus asks us to follow him and really know him, not simply know about him, like some sort of groupie or fan.

[56-title slide] I want to address something that Kyle also says in his book. These messages are not meant to make someone question their faith or feel guilty, like they are not doing enough. We are saved by grace alone, the result of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This is God's gift to us. I'm not asking you to doubt yourself for not measuring up. Please understand. I'm simply asking all of us to be honest about our relationship with Jesus and take the steps necessary to stay in love with him, and not just pretend to be a Christian.

[57-Money] If you've ever created a budget, you know there are times when you have to make sacrifices to afford something you want. When Katja and I bought our first house, we had to look at our income and figure out if we could afford the mortgage payments. When I bought my first car, I had to do the same homework.

Anticipating costs was something I didn't fully understand when I first went to college. I knew I had scholarships. I knew I had to get student loans. But every semester, I just went to the bursar's office and signed the paperwork. It wasn't until I graduated that I realized the debt that I owed, and fortunately, I was able to eventually pay it off.

In college, I had the opportunity once to fly to Hawaii with some friends. I took a long hard look at my bank account. I had just enough for the airfare plus meals and a few touristy things. I came back home and realized that I had cut it quite close...I had less than fifty dollars left in my account when returned, but I

had managed to pay for the trip. Imagine the trouble I could have landed in if I had gone broke thousands of miles away from home.

[58-Jesus and crowd] When Jesus was preaching to the crowds, he wanted them to understand there was a cost to following him. Not just a financial cost, but an emotional, relational, spiritual cost. The scripture says large crowds were following Jesus, but he didn't want to sign autographs. He wanted his disciples to live according to his example. So he turned to them and said these dramatic words.

[59-Luke 14:26-27] - "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. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Those are incredibly strong words. They even seem to contradict what Jesus teaches elsewhere in the scripture. Aren't we supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves, love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us? Doesn't the fifth Commandment say to honor your father and mother? Doesn't the Bible say Christians are supposed to be known by our love? Yes! So what is Jesus saying?

[60-race track] Let's be clear. Jesus is using hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. Idleman puts it this way: Jesus wants to be our "one and only." It's like a race, but instead of Jesus competing with everyone else for your heart, Jesus is the only one on the race track. He doesn't even want there to be any competition. (p. 58-59) If you love Jesus, he wants your love to be so strong, you figuratively hate everyone else in comparison.

The question I would ask is, "Is Jesus worth that kind of love?" Those of you sitting in the pews or participating online might be thinking, "Really, Pastor? That seems kind of obvious." I'm not asking rhetorically. Is loving Jesus really worth it? Would you love him more than anyone else in your life?

[60-Jesus on the cross] For me, the answer is yes, but I don't assume it. I look at what the Bible tells me. Jesus loved me first. Jesus loved me enough to give up heaven and be born in a cold, dark stable to poor parents. Jesus loved me enough to live on this earth, be subject to ridicule and rejection by his own

people, to die on a cross to save me from my sin, and to rise again to show me that following him leads to eternal life. He loved me enough to give me the Church as a place where I can connect with his followers, learn to serve the world, learn to die to my old self and be filled with the life-giving Holy Spirit. So, yes, I think loving Jesus is worth everything he asks of me.

[62-foundation wall] Not everyone feels that way. In fact, Jesus is sure that the crowd doesn't understand, so he paints two examples. First, would you build a tower if you couldn't even pay for the foundation? You'd end up with a half-finished project and everyone would laugh at you. Of course no one would.

When I was in high school, my family built a really nice cabin at our hunting camp. I remember the day the foundation was poured, realizing the rest of the work was up to us. With lots of help from friends and family, we completed the cabin and it still stands today. I can't imagine what would have happened if we had only left it at the foundation, or the shell of the house. It would have been unthinkable. We had to see the project to completion.

[63-soldiers] Second, Jesus says, if a king is about to go to war, won't he count his soldiers and compare them to his enemy's forces? If the scales don't tip in his favor, he will send out a delegation to negotiate for peace before he wastes his army in a hopeless battle. Of course, in that situation, we all would count the cost, and do whatever it takes to achieve the optimal outcome.

Following Jesus is costly, but it is possible, and it is totally worth it.

[64-checkup] In his book, Not a Fan, Idleman asks a few questions, like a checkup at the doctor's office. There are signs that point to the conditions of our hearts. They are not definitive, but taken together, they tell us an awful lot about ourselves and our relationship with Jesus.

[65-Question 1] The first question is this: "Is Jesus one of many, or is he your One and Only?" (p.59) Suppose, when I proposed to my wife 21 years ago, she said to me, "Yes, of course I'll marry you, but on one condition: I still want to date other people." Super weird and awkward, right? That's not how a "One and Only" relationship works. Thankfully, she and I have proven our mutual commitment to each other.

But you know what else? I wouldn't want to be married to Katja if she said, "I love you more than I love Jesus." And I think the same is true for her. If we are going to follow Jesus, he not only has to be our Lord, he has to be our Love. Can I love Jesus and love my wife? Yes. And my parents. And my children. But Jesus comes first. There is no competition.

I come from a Christian background, so for me, it was probably easy to follow Jesus this way. My family supported me. For Katja, it was different. Living in East Germany, there was not a lot of Christian influence for her. True story: when Katja was baptized, her parents asked her when she was going to "get over this phase." Eventually, they began to understand that her life had completely changed, but at first, she was going against the flow in her own family. That's saying something.

[66-Question 2] Idleman asks a second question to help us clarify our love. "What do you sacrifice your money for?" (p.60) In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (NIV) Idleman recalls actual conversations with members of his church, where they would ask him, "What's the most I can spend on my house?" and later ask, "Does God want me to give to him out of my net income or my gross income?" In other words, "What's the most I can spend on my house and the least I can give to God?" (p.60) What does that say about our first and only love?

I read this quote the other day: "It's easy to dream about the generosity we intend to show when we have the means. The truth is that God cares more about the \$5 we have today than the \$100 we intend to have in the future."¹ We need to show our love to Jesus now, not delay our affection for some undefined length of time. Our wallets and bank accounts will tell us quite frankly where our love is directed.

[67-Question 3] Here's a third question: "When you are hurt, where do you go for comfort?" (p.61) We have friends, family and others to confide in. That's certainly healthy, but do they divide our attention? What about comfort food?

¹ <https://www.cdfcapital.org/generous-people-bible/>

Work? Video games? Do we use them to distract us from what is really important? Or is our first instinct to cry out in prayer to our Creator?

[68-Question 4] A fourth question: "What disappoints or frustrates you the most?" (p.62) When you get a bad grade? When your favorite team loses a game? When it rains while you're doing the spring cleaning for the church? Life has its ups and downs, but if they overload our attitudes, self-worth, and sense of wonder, maybe things are out of balance.

[69-Question 5] The last question: "What gets you really excited?" (p.63) This one hits me hard. When I win a board game, when my Northwestern Wildcats win, I'm over the top. After almost ten years of Sunday morning preaching, I know my sermons are *slightly* better when the 'Cats win on Saturday. I openly admit my need to repent! Seriously, I'd rather be excited that someone asked to be baptized. I'd rather shout and rejoice that we prayed for someone to be healed and they were. I'd jump up and down for new church members, confirmands, real disciples who say, "You're a nice guy, Pastor, but you're not Jesus."

[70-Luke 14:34-35] Jesus ends this passage with this thought: "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." (Luke 14:34-35) You know what? True love is a little salty, in a good way. It adds flavor to life. It's noticeable. If salt wasn't salty, it wouldn't have any purpose.

If we are Christians, if we say we love Jesus, it simply has to show up in our lives. It might take a while to get there, it might mean changing our habits and faith practices until they do come naturally. It's OK. We are all sinners in need of grace. The more we realize it, the more we will love Jesus, because in him every one of our needs is met. He is the lover of our souls. In him, we find life and peace.

[71-title slide] Friends, we can do this. We really can show the world that we love Jesus. We don't love an institution, we don't love a tradition, we don't love a set of laws, a bunch of "do's and don'ts." We love Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who calls us to love him in return, and find out that his love completes us.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse: Luke 14:27 - "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Reflection Questions:

1. When have you "counted the cost" to determine if something was possible? What purchase or decision did you make and why?
2. Why do you think Jesus challenged his disciples to carry their cross and be prepared to reject their own families? Do you think that decision was easy or hard for them?
3. What does it mean to truly follow Jesus? What does he ask us to give up and prioritize to be his disciples?
4. What "loves" in your life compete with Jesus? How can you set them free in order to stay committed to Christ?
5. Ponder this thought: "Is it worth it to me to follow Jesus?" Make a list of some of the eternal benefits Christ has given you, as well as some of the things you have sacrificed for the sake of the gospel.