

# (A Good Foundation) 4. Discipleship

by Zac Poonen

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*True discipleship involves a radical change of attitude towards our relatives, self-life, and possessions, making God first in our affections and giving up everything to Him.*

**Scripture:** Luke 14:25

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Self Denial"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the three essential conditions of discipleship as outlined by Jesus in Luke 14:25-35. The first condition is to cut off inordinate love for relatives, putting God above all else. The second condition is to hate our self-life, denying ourselves daily and taking up our cross to follow Jesus. The third condition is to give up all possessions, recognizing that everything we have belongs to God and must be surrendered to Him completely.

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## Transcript

When Jesus told His apostles to go into every nation and to make disciples, they had no doubt in their minds as to what He meant. (Matthew 28:19). For He had already explained what it meant to be His disciple.

Luke 14:25-35 reveals most clearly the three conditions of discipleship. There Jesus speaks about a man who having laid a foundation for a tower, couldn't complete it, because he was unable to pay the cost of construction (verses 28-30). That proves that it does cost something to be a disciple. Jesus told us to sit down first and count that cost before even starting to build.

God doesn't want us to wait for many years after our sins are forgiven, before understanding what discipleship really means. Jesus told people about the cost of discipleship as soon as they came to Him.

He said that a believer who was unwilling to be a disciple was as useless to God as salt that had lost its savour (Luke 14:35).

'Hating' our Relatives

The first condition of discipleship is that we must cut off the natural, inordinate love that we have for our relatives.

Jesus said "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple " (Luke 14:26).

Those are strong words. What does it mean to 'hate'? To hate is the same as to kill (1 John 3:15). What we are asked to put to death here is the natural affection that we have for our relatives.

Does that mean that we are not to love them? No. It certainly doesn't mean that. When we give up our human affection for them, God will replace it with Divine love. Our love for our relatives will then be pure - in the sense that God will always be first in our affections, and not our relatives.

Many don't obey God because they are afraid to offend their father, mother or wife etc. The Lord demands first place in our life. And if we don't give Him that place, we can't be His disciples at all.

Look at Jesus' own example. Although He loved His widowed mother, yet He never allowed her to influence Him away from the perfect will of His Father, even in small matters. We see an example of this at the marriage at Cana where Jesus refused to act on His mother's prompting (John 2:4).

Jesus also taught us how to 'hate' our brothers. When Peter tried to turn Him away from going to the cross, He turned around and rebuked him with some of the sharpest words that He ever uttered. He said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me" (Matthew 16:23). Peter had made his suggestion with a lot of human love. But Jesus rebuked him, because what he had suggested was contrary to the Father's will.

The Father was always supreme in Jesus' affections. He expects us to have the same attitude too. After His resurrection He asked Peter whether he loved Him more than everything else on earth (John 21:15-17). Only those who love the Lord supremely are given responsibilities in His church.

The leader of the Ephesian church was in danger of being rejected because he had lost his initial devotion for the Lord (Revelation 2:1-5).

If we can say, like the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven, Lord, but Thee? And besides Thee I desire nothing on earth," then we have truly fulfilled the first condition of discipleship (Psalm 73:25).

The love that Jesus demands from us is not the emotional, sentimental, human affection that expresses itself in singing stirring songs of devotion to Him. No. If we love Him, we'll obey Him (John 14:21).

### Hating Our Own Life

The second condition of discipleship is that we must hate our own self-life. Jesus said,

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own life, he cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26).

He amplified that further by saying,

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:27).

This is one of the least understood of all of Jesus' teachings.

He said that a disciple would have to "deny himself and take up his cross daily" (Luke 9:23). More important than reading our Bible or praying daily, we have to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. To deny our Self is the same as to hate our own life - the life that we have inherited from Adam. To take up

the cross is to put that Self-life to death. We have to hate that life first, before we can slay it.

Our self-life is the main enemy of the life of Christ. The Bible calls this 'the flesh'. The flesh tempts us to seek our own gain, our own honour, our own pleasure, our own way etc. If we are honest, we'll have to admit that many of our best actions are corrupted by evil motives that arise from our Self-life. Unless we hate this flesh, we will never be able to follow the Lord.

This is why Jesus spoke so much about hating (or losing) our life.

In fact, this phrase is repeated six times in the gospels (Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 14:26; John 12:25). This is the one saying of our Lord that is repeated most often in the gospels. Yet it is the least preached about and the least understood!

To hate your own life is to give up seeking your own rights and privileges, to stop seeking your own reputation, to give up your ambitions and interests, and to stop seeking your own way etc. You can be a disciple of Jesus, only if you are willing to go this way.

### Giving Up All Our Possessions

The third condition of discipleship is that we must give up all our own possessions. Jesus said, "No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33).

Our possessions are what we possess as our own. To give them all up means that we no longer consider anything as our own.

We see an illustration of this in the life of Abraham. Isaac was his own son - his possession. One day God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. And Abraham laid Isaac on the altar and was ready to slay him. But God intervened and told him that the sacrifice was not necessary, because he had proved his willingness to obey (Genesis 22). After that, Abraham recognised that even though he had Isaac in his house, he no longer possessed him as his own. Isaac now belonged to God.

This is what it means to give up all our possessions. All that we have must be laid on the altar and given up to God.

God may allow us to use some of those things. But we can't think of them as our own any more. Even if we are living in our own house, we must think of the house as God's; and that He has allowed us to stay in it rent-free! This is true discipleship.

Have we done that with all our possessions? Our possessions include our bank-account, property, job, qualifications, gifts and talents, wife and children and everything else that we value on this earth. We have to lay them all on the altar if we want to be true disciples.

God wants us to love Him with all our heart. That's the meaning of 'the pure heart' mentioned in Matthew 5:8. It's not enough to have a clean conscience. A clean conscience only means that we have given up sin. A pure heart is one that has given up everything!

And so we see that true discipleship involves a radical change of attitude towards:

our relatives and loved ones;

our self-life; and

our possessions.

Unless we face these issues squarely right at the beginning of our Christian life, it will be impossible to lay a good foundation.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/a-good-foundation-4-discipleship/>

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