

CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION  
Lenten Small Group Study Guide  
*The Cost of Discipleship*  
I. GRACE AND DISCIPLESHIP

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**Matthew 14:22-33**

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

**Chapter One: Costly Grace**

- Cheap grace holds that an intellectual assent to an idea is sufficient to provide forgiveness of sins; costly grace recognizes and leads to the obligation of discipleship.
- Cheap grace leads people to believe that their only duty as Christians is to go to church for an hour or so on Sunday and be assured that their sins are forgiven; costly grace leads to a serious following of Christ.
- God gives us grace; we give ourselves cheap grace.
- Grace is intended to open the door to Christ; cheap grace only closes it.
- Cheap grace is a vaccination. It gives us just enough of Jesus to prevent us from catching the real thing. Costly grace is the grace of Christian discipleship.
- Cheap grace costs us nothing (in the short term). Costly grace costs us our life, but it is also the source of the only true and complete life.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What does cheap grace do to asceticism? (pp. 44)
2. What is "costly grace"? Why is it costly? (p. 45)
3. According to Bonhoeffer, what how did cheap grace take root in Catholicism? How did it take root in Protestantism? (pp. 47-50)
4. According to Bonhoeffer, how was Luther's teaching on justification by "grace alone" corrupted? (p. 48-50)

5. What has caused the collapse of the “organized Church” according to Bonhoeffer? Is this true today? (p. 54)
6. For Bonhoeffer, what is the Church’s most “urgent” problem? (p. 55)

## **Chapter Two: The Call to Discipleship**

- The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus) ... out of the realm of finite into the realm of infinite possibilities. We are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person.
- The chapter looks at three would-be disciples in Luke 9:57-62. The first offered to follow Jesus. The second allowed circumstances to stand in the way of the call. The third attempted to establish his own terms for discipleship.
- The grace of his call bursts all the bonds of legalism. It transcends the difference between the Law and the Gospel.
- Jesus’ whole life is summed up in the Apostles’ Creed by the word “suffered.”
- The law must be broken for the sake of Jesus.
- The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus.
- Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.
- The call to discipleship is followed by a first step that cuts the disciple off from his previous existence and produces a new situation, where faith is possible.
- We can only take this step (toward Jesus) aright if we fix our eyes not on the work we do but on the word with which Jesus calls us to do it.
- The one thing that matters is practical obedience.
- The rich young man was called to the grace of discipleship. The lawyer, who sought to tempt Jesus, was only sent back to the commandment (the law).

## **QUESTIONS**

1. “The response of the disciple is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus.” What does Bonhoeffer mean here? And how does he unpack this claim throughout the chapter? (p. 57)
2. How does “abstract” theology and religious knowledge sometimes get in the way of discipleship? (p. 59)
3. Regarding the would-be disciples from Luke, which one do you identify with the most? (pp. 60-62)
4. How does faith relate to obedience? Why is thinking about this important? (pp. 62-64)
5. Bonhoeffer calls the first step of discipleship an “external work” but necessary nonetheless. Why? Yet, how does this “external work” find grace? (pp. 64-66)
6. According to Bonhoeffer, how should a pastor deal with a person who has lost his or her faith? Do you agree with his advice? (pp. 68-70)
7. What’s happened to the person who has lost faith? (pp. 68-70)

8. Bonhoeffer looks at the story of the rich young man from Matthew 19:16-22. How does the rich young man evade the real issue of discipleship according to Bonhoeffer? (pp. 70-76)
9. What's so deceptive about the question "Who is my neighbor?" (p. 77)
10. "Neighborliness is not a quality in other people, it is simply their claim on ourselves." Have you ever thought about it this way? How does this change the way you deal with others? (p. 78)

### **Chapter Three: Single-Minded Obedience**

- The chapter explores the means by which people evade the demands of single-minded obedience.
- Don't treat Jesus' commands differently from the plain language so clearly intended. When we do so, we exchange obedience for disobedience.
- Only through actual obedience can someone become liberated to believe.
- In Jesus the law is at once fulfilled and cancelled.
- Salvation through following Jesus is not something we can achieve ourselves, but with God all things are possible.
- Costly discipleship is not to be confused with human excellence or ability. Obedience to Jesus' call is from his initiative, his grace, his power, and never our own. It calls us to be utterly dependent on the one who calls – Jesus Christ.

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. How do we argue ourselves out of single-minded obedience? (pp. 79-81)
2. What do you think Bonhoeffer means by a "paradoxical understanding" of Christ's commands? Does he make sense? Does he contradict himself? (pp. 82-83)
3. Also, does he make sense when he talks about "exegesis"? How should a disciple read the Bible? (pp. 83-84)

### **Chapter Four: Discipleship and the Cross**

- The call to follow is closely connected to the passion of Jesus, who had to suffer AND be rejected so the Scriptures could be fulfilled.
- Just as Jesus had to suffer, so disciples must share in this suffering and rejection, perhaps even in his crucifixion.
- A Christian must deny self, be aware of Jesus and not of self. (Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself. It means not thinking of yourself at all.)
- Only when we become selfless, unaware of the pain of our own cross, are we ready to bear the cross for the sake of Christ.
- Suffering for the Christian is the fruit of exclusive allegiance to Christ.
- The first suffering all Christians must suffer is the call to abandon all worldly attachments.
- A cross is waiting for you.
- A call to follow Christ is always a call to share the work of forgiving people their sins.

- The cup of suffering will indeed pass from Jesus, but only by his drinking it.
- Enduring a cross is not a tragedy but rather the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Christ.
- Luther quote: Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge.

#### QUESTIONS

1. Why does Bonhoeffer emphasize the distinction between suffering and rejection? (pp. 86-87)
2. Bonhoeffer says suffering and rejection are essential to Christian life. Does he have reasons for saying this? Does he need reasons? Do you agree or disagree with him? (pp. 87- 88)
3. How is the cross laid on every Christian? (pp. 89-90)
4. Bonhoeffer says Christians bear the sins and shame of others. Do you agree? And if so, what does that look like? (p. 90)

#### **Chapter Five: Discipleship and the Individual**

- Christ makes us individuals by calling us.
- All receive an individual call. Because we fear isolation, we attempt to align ourselves with others and their physical environment.
- We try to build a barrier that will prevent a decision from having to be made.
- We are not willing to stand alone before Jesus, but nothing can protect us from the moment of our call.
- Christ wants to be at the center of our world. He is the Mediator, and no other relationship can be as important as the one with our Mediator.
- He is the Mediator between God and man, man and man, and man and reality.
- What is not given us through the incarnate Son is not given us by God.
- Anything I cannot thank God for, for the sake of Christ, I cannot thank God for at all.
- Discipleship is a complete attachment to Christ's person. It means not looking to the law, or to personal piety, or to the world for fulfillment.
- If we take Jesus at his word and dare to become individuals, our reward is the fellowship of the church.

#### QUESTIONS

1. "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals." Considering the context—1930s Germany—what do you think is the immediate significance of this chapter for Bonhoeffer? What's the immediate significance for us? (p. 94)
2. When must something be hated for the sake of Christ? (p. 97)
3. According to Bonhoeffer, after becoming true individuals by the call of Christ, disciples belong to the fellowship of the Church. Is that how you think about belonging to the Church? (p. 101)