

Weighing the Cost

This world is not fair.

Life does not go the way we plan it. Time cannot be controlled. We are here for a moment and then we are gone — like a vapor. And in that vapor of a life, we are asked to make a choice that will echo beyond everything visible.

I want to be honest with you about something before we go any further. Because this chapter is not simply making arguments. It is something more personal than that. It is the story of a person who followed God hard, got worn down by the weight of it, quietly stepped back, spent several years in the motions — and then had to decide all over again whether it was worth it.

That person is me.



WHEN THE STORMS KEPT COMING

There was a time I was following God very closely. Everything in me wanted Him to be my focus. In all that I did, I tried to keep Him first. I didn't care what people thought of me or who it was I was talking to — I wanted Jesus to be the center.

And then the storms came. Not one. Not two. Years of them. One difficult season would end and another would begin. I began to lose my sight and feel the weight of the world pressing down. My doubts started to drown me — like Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus on the water. That one particular year, my theme word was 'focus'. And that year, I lost my focus.

I didn't stop believing in God. I didn't stop praying or reading my Bible. I just stopped as hard as I was going. I had reached a point where years of heartaches, testing, and storms had finally worn me down. I wanted to think of myself for a while.

For five years, I went through the motions. And I noticed something strange. The storms seemed to stop. Not near as many, what I would consider, attacks from the enemy. No new situations that required intense prayer or desperate faith. From the outside, things were calmer.

But deep down, I was miserable.

Part of me was relieved not to be under attack anymore. But another part of me knew exactly what that meant: I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing. The enemy had no reason to target me. I wasn't threatening anything.

I had nostalgia for the seasons when I used to worship God in everything. I would remember the trials He brought me through and I would write a song to Him from my heart. I missed those days. But I didn't want the cost that came with them.

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THE MOMENT OF DECISION

Several years later, I had had enough of the emptiness. I decided to start seeking God again. The very first day I started, certain things began happening that made me stop and think: if I follow hard after God again, the path may get difficult again.

I sat with that for a few days. I genuinely did not want to go back into that battle. In my own eyes, it just didn't seem worth it. But then I recognized something — I had been miserable without it. The comfort of a quiet life wasn't actually comfort. It was numbness.

And in that moment, I realized what I was doing. Something important.

I was counting the cost.

So I went to my phone and I started to write. Two columns. Jesus. Satan. I wrote down everything about each. And then I wrote out what following Jesus actually costs in this life.

Jesus: Life. Hope. Freedom. Peace. Joy. Love. Light.

Satan: Hate. Death. Misery. Destruction. Depression. Oppression. Darkness.

Following Jesus in this life: hardships. Persecution. Giving up certain freedoms. Giving up self. Giving up the world's version of success. Giving up comfort. Giving up the timeline I had planned.

And then I wrote this: Life is a dot. Then gone. A drop of water in the sea. A grain of sand on all the earth's shores. A single leaf in the forest.

Eternity has already started. And I am currently choosing which road I will take.

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SIMPLE. NOT EASY.

Would you trade everything you have in this life — health, relationships, possessions, intellect, or whatever else you consider of earthly value — for everything of God?

It's simple to answer yes to that question without actually counting the cost. To those who truly know God, the answer seems obvious. Of course. He is worth more than anything this world could offer.

But is it really that easy to say without a doubt: God, if I wake up tomorrow and everything I love is gone, I will still follow You with all my heart? Is your relationship

with God so close that He is not only your foundation of hope for salvation, but your foundation of joy and ultimate satisfaction? Does your purpose in life come from the things of this world, or from the God who made everything?

I realized something sitting with that note on my phone. I had been foolish to think that simple pleasures in a quiet life were better than the hardships of following Jesus hard.

Jesus Himself said: in this world, you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” — John 16:33
NIV

Following Jesus isn't easy. But it is simple. Not easy — simple. What I mean is that He has already done all the work. All we must do is count the cost, take up our cross, and follow Him. Daily.

What following Jesus means is not necessarily that you will have nothing or that life will be miserable. What it means is that you are willing to follow Jesus even if it does mean that. Because if you don't count the cost beforehand — if you don't pre-determine to trust God when the trouble comes — you will not be prepared when it does.

As soon as I decided to follow Jesus with my full heart again, I recognized the patterns of the enemy returning almost immediately. And I wasn't surprised. I expected it. Because following Jesus means advancing into spiritual territory the enemy does not want you to take. If you don't expect resistance when you advance, you never fully counted the cost.

But following Jesus is worth it. Every time. Without exception.



WE ARE NOT LONE SOLDIERS

I cannot do this alone. And neither can you.

This is why the Church matters. This is why the family matters. This is why like-mindedness — that word we have come back to throughout this book — is not just a theological concept but a survival strategy. We are not lone soldiers. We are a full army. And armies do not function when their members are isolated from one another, fighting separate battles with no coordination, no communication, and no one watching their back.

The enemy knows this. Which is why so much of his strategy is designed to keep us from thinking like-minded. Division in the church. Offenses between brothers and sisters. Theological arguments that put all of our focus on knowledge rather than Jesus. Pride that makes every person feel like they are carrying the load alone, or worse, that they have nothing to offer. The enemy will use every device at his disposal to keep the army fragmented.

Because a fragmented army loses.

Part of why I am writing this book is because I know the importance of like-mindedness. One person can only do so much. But when there are multiple people walking in the Spirit, seeing with spiritual eyes, thinking like-minded, working together toward the same Kingdom — there is almost no limit to what God can do through them. That is how He designed the Church to function. And the enemy is absolutely desperate to prevent it.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” — Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV

◆ ◆ ◆ ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER — TODAY

The Bible gives us one of the most practical and urgent commands in all of Scripture, and we treat it like a suggestion.

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” — Hebrews 3:13 NIV

Daily. As long as it is called Today. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not when you get around to it or when the moment feels right. Today. The urgency in that command is not accidental. The writer of Hebrews understood something that we often miss: the window for encouragement is narrow, and the cost of missing it is high.

Look at what the verse says will happen without it. Not that people will feel a little discouraged. Not that they will have a rough week. They will be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. That is the consequence of isolation. That is what happens when the people around you go un-encouraged long enough.

Think about what we have already established about the mind. The same thought repeated rewires the brain. The same lie spoken over a person long enough becomes their self-understanding. This is what Wurmbrand’s captors understood — play the message long enough and people start to believe it. The enemy is doing this every single day to the people around you. Negative thoughts. Half-truths taken out of context. Small whispers that accumulate over time into walls of discouragement. “You’re not good enough. Nobody cares. You will never amount to anything. You are too far gone.” After a while, without a voice speaking something different, people believe it.

Encouragement is the counter-offensive. It is not a nice gesture — it is a spiritual weapon. It breaks the loop. It introduces a different voice into a mind that has been hearing the same destructive message on repeat. It is the Helmet of Salvation in action — one person placing a piece of armor on another through something as simple as a word spoken at the right time.

Notice the verse doesn't say to encourage one another when it is convenient. Or to encourage the people who seem like they need it. It says daily. Which means this is a posture, not an event. A way of moving through life, not an occasional act of kindness.

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THE DECEITFULNESS OF SILENCE

I want to look closely at one word in that verse: deceitfulness.

It doesn't say hardened by sin's lies. It says hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Deceitfulness is different from an outright lie. Deceitfulness is an action or statement that is dishonest, untrustworthy, and intentionally misleading — designed to trick. And sometimes what is used to deceive is not entirely false. Sometimes the statement is technically true. But as we established earlier in this book, a half-truth left off another truth can change the entire meaning. The enemy doesn't always need to lie outright. He just needs to leave out the part that changes everything.

This is why encouragement is so spiritually significant. Because the person walking under a half-truth — the person who believes a distorted version of their own story — needs someone to speak the missing piece. To say: yes, you failed, but here is what God says about failure. Yes, that happened, but here is what I see in you. Yes, it is hard, but you are not alone in it.

We have that power. And we leave it unused every day.

I have caught myself doing it. I would think something genuinely good about someone — a real observation, something that would have meant a great deal to them — and I would mention it to someone else instead of saying it to them directly. Or I would hold it entirely. And that person would go on carrying whatever weight they were carrying, never knowing that someone saw something worth saying.

There are people we love deeply and are very close to, that we have never once said “I love you” to. Why? What would it cost? The word sits right there. The feeling is real. But something holds us back — some version of pride, or awkwardness, or the assumption that they already know. They may know. But they need to hear it. Today.

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EVERYONE WANTS TO SAVE THE WORLD

A friend of mine told me something years ago that I have never forgotten. I don't know if she came up with it or heard it somewhere. But she said: “Josh, everyone wants to save the world, but not one person wants to help their mom with the dishes.”

I have thought about that line more times than I can count.

So often we want to have great impact — we want to reach the masses, we want to make a difference, we want to be used by God in significant ways. And those desires are not wrong. But in the pursuit of the grand vision, we walk right past the person directly in

front of us. Our family. Our friend. The person sitting next to us who is quietly being hardened by sin's deceitfulness while we are busy planning how to change the world.

How much do we encourage the people we actually live with? The ones we see every day? Sometimes the people who would be most impacted by our words are the ones who receive them least. We will talk about someone to others — say how much we admire them, how proud we are, how much they mean to us — but we have never said it to their face. The person we are describing has never heard it. They have gone without it. Not because it was not true, but because we kept it to ourselves.

That is the deceitfulness of silence. It allows the enemy's voice to go unanswered in a life where your voice could have made the difference.



NO COMPETITION IN THE KINGDOM

Encouragement costs nothing, yet it is so often withheld. Not because another person's calling threatens ours, but because the flesh is slow to rejoice in someone else's good. It compares. It measures. It turns inward. But that is not the way of Christ.

In the Kingdom of God, we are not rivals. We are fellow laborers, fellow soldiers, members of one body. When God is at work in the life of the person beside you, that is not something to resent or hold at a distance. It is something to be grateful for. Their calling matters. Their growth matters. Their breakthrough matters.

The flesh resists that kind of generosity. It wants recognition. It wants its own way, its own timing, its own importance. And when that spirit takes root, encouragement becomes scarce and the body suffers for it.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” — Philippians 2:3–4 NIV

Like-mindedness in practice does not mean sameness. It does not require identical personalities, identical gifts, or agreement on every point. It means having a real love for the good of the person next to you. It means wanting to see them strengthened, established, and used by God. And when one part of the body flourishes, the whole body is blessed.

Encourage them. Today.



GOD CAN DO IMMEASURABLY MORE

We should want more than anything for our dreams to align with Christ. If He is not for them, we shouldn't want them. But if He is — if what we are carrying truly comes from

Him — then our biggest thought about what is possible is small in comparison to what He is actually able to do.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” — Ephesians 3:20–21 NIV

Immeasurably more. Not slightly more. Not better than we expected. Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. That is the God we serve. That is the God whose power is at work within us. And that is the God whose Kingdom advances when His people stop competing with one another and start doing what the verse says: spurring one another on, encouraging one another daily, putting each other’s interests ahead of their own.

Count the cost. It is real. Following Jesus will cost you something — in this life, in this world, in this vapor of an existence we have been given. But the math is not even close.

A dot against eternity. A drop of water against the ocean. A single leaf against the forest.

Count it. And then take up your cross. Today.