

At Christmas Thirteen years ago my niece, Casandra, was 10 years old. And all she really wanted that year was a new video game system made by Nintendo called the Wii. She told Santa as much (even though she was a little too old to be sitting on Santa's lap). She told my sister Diana (her mom) and she told her dad, Gary.

Now Gary, loving his daughter very much, immediately said "of course honey, we'll get a Wii for Christmas". And then, since it was still early November, put it out of his mind. You see, Gary knew that he would be able to afford the price of the Wii, after all they were only about \$250 and so didn't worry too much about it.

He started his search on black Friday at a Best Buy in Maplewood, MN, near his home. He stood in line for 3 hours, waiting for the store to open. And when he got to where the WII's were, you guessed it, they were all gone.

From there he went to no less than two dozen other stores over the next few weeks, only to find that they were sold out of the coveted video game system.

He even went so far as to attempt to purchase one from a private seller, only to find out that it was a scam, intended to relieve him of \$500.

Sadly, Gary was not able to purchase the game in time for Christmas morning. I'm sure you can imagine the disappointment that Cassandra felt, and even more so the guilt and embarrassment that Gary felt.

Now, I have a question for you.

What do you think was Gary's first mistake?

Was it not starting his search right away?

Or did he pick the wrong store to start his shopping?

Perhaps he should have asked for help from other people, who would have been able to look for the game when he could not.

What if I told you that Gary's mistake was that he didn't realize what he would have to go through to get his daughter what would turn out to be, quite possibly, the most popular Christmas present of 2006. And that he wasn't prepared for the ordeal that lay ahead.

In other words, Gary didn't count the full cost of saying yes to his daughter. He thought it would be easy. He thought it would only be \$250.

So what would you say if I told you that Jesus is asking us to do exactly that? That He is asking us to count the cost of say yes to him, the cost of being a disciple?

Let's take another look at today's reading from Luke's Gospel, chapter 14 verses 25-33. But let's use a different translation.

A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, 26 "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. 27 And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.

28 "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? 29 Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. 30 They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'

31 "Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? 32 And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. 33 So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."

That is from the New Living Translation, and I used that so we might avoid any confusion about Jesus telling us to hate our families. Rather he is telling us that, compared to our love of Him, our love for our families and everyone and everything else and even our own lives should be likened to hate. That is, there should be no comparison.

What he is doing here is telling us that there is a great cost to being a Christian. He is telling us that we may actually be outcast from our families and friends for our belief in Him. And he is telling us that, in order to follow Him, we must be willing to let this happen.

In other words, we must be willing to carry our own cross.

He then goes on to tell us to make sure that we have what it takes to carry that cross. He says "But don't begin until you count the cost".

And gives us two excellent examples of what happens when we don't "count the cost".

That first example about starting construction on a building. Let's put that into modern terms.

If you were going to build a house, wouldn't you get bids from at least three different contractors? And once you got those bids, wouldn't you then go to the bank to see if you had

enough money to pay them? Or at least make sure you were able to get a loan large enough to do so. And even then, wouldn't you look at your budget to make sure you could afford the monthly mortgage payments (of course, the bank would take care of that last part for you).

Now, how many of you remember when the "housing bubble" burst a few years back. And guess why that happened. That's right, a lot of people bought houses that they couldn't afford to pay for, and so the banks ended up owning a bunch of houses that nobody could afford.

In short, a lot of people failed to "count the cost" before saying yes to buying a new home.

It kind of makes me want to say "If only they had read these verses from Luke's gospel". And yet, so many people say that the Bible isn't relevant anymore. But that's another sermon for another time.

Back to what Jesus was saying about counting the cost.

Let's skip past the example of armies to verse 33.

Jesus tells us "So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own."

Wow, that's a really tall order.

Do we really have to give up everything we own? He's already said that we need to be ready to give up our families and friends but do we really need to take vows of poverty? Sell everything and give it to the poor? Live as missionaries in some third world country?

I don't think we need to take it that far, but we need to be willing to, if that's what it comes to.

We had perfect example of this willingness in our epistle reading from Paul's letter to Philemon.

Here we have Paul, once a man of great status and reputation among the Jews of Jesus' time. In fact, he was a Pharisee.

He gave up that life to become a disciple of Jesus. In fact, when he wrote his letter to Philemon, as well as many of his other letters, he was in prison because of his Christianity. That's a pretty high cost. One might say that it cost him everything.

Now, here's another cost that Paul paid. Paul is sending this letter to let Philemon know that he is sending Onesimus, his own son, to fill whatever role Philemon wishes. But with hopes that he will be as a "beloved brother" to him.

That was part of the cost that Paul had counted, and he was willing to pay it.

And I do believe that this is the kind of willingness that Jesus is looking for. He is not looking for Sunday morning Christians. He says as much when he tells us that, unless we are willing to give up everything, we cannot be his disciples.

In order to follow him we must be willing to make sacrifices.

And so I would ask: are we willing to be excluded from certain social or professional circles because of our faith? Do we willingly grab hold of our cross to follow Jesus? Or do we put earthly values ahead of godly values?

And have we considered, what is the cost of not taking up our cross and following Jesus?