

Is the Cost Worth it?

As some of you know, I played basketball for two years at Kearney State College in Nebraska. Playing at that level is nothing like playing at the Division One level, but it still requires a tremendous amount of work. In the off-season we were expected to be in the gym pretty much every day and to participate in some rigorous conditioning. During the season, of course, there was daily practice, which was a lot of hard work. We had very little time off over the Christmas break. I still enjoyed the games, but at the end of two years, I decided to quit because the cost of playing basketball was no longer worth it to me. There were other things I wanted to do with my time.

There are very few things in life that we will do, and continue to do, if we don't think the cost is worth it.

Over the past three weeks, we have been talking about reaching out to those who are far from God. We believe that this is who God calls us to be as a church. Our vision is that there will be hundreds of us, moved by compassion, intentionally entering into genuine friendships with those who are far from God believing that God wants to use those relationships to help people find their way to God.

Many of you, like me, have been compelled by the things we've been talking about. You want to be engaged in befriending those who are far from God. You want to be able to look across this room some day and see a friend sitting there that you helped lead to faith in Christ. You really want to go for this kind of life.

But here's a question that I have for myself and for you – Will we REALLY go for it? Will this sense of motivation that we feel right now translate into us living differently or will this sense of motivation sort of fade away once this sermon series ends and we end up not really living differently?

I think it is important to recognize that to live this out is going to require changes in our lives. There will be a cost. And there are very few things in life that we will do, and continue to do, if we don't think the cost is worth it. Unless we believe the cost of this kind of life is worth it we will not continue to live out this kind of life. And so this morning I'd like us to look at the cost of compassion and consider if it is truly worth it. To do this I'd like us to look at 1 Thessalonians 2 and see how Paul thought about his ministry.

While you turn there I want to give you a brief bit of background on this book. Paul traveled to Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. He arrived in Thessalonica after having ministered in Philippi where Paul and his companions had been beaten with rods (Acts 16:22) and thrown in prison (16:24) for preaching Christ. After being released from prison they traveled to Thessalonica to continue to share the Good News.

In 1 Thess. 2, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of his ministry among them. One of the things we pick up as we read this is:

The Cost of Compassion (1 Thess. 2:1-12)

In verse 1, Paul writes:

¹ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

Paul says that they spoke the gospel to them *amid much opposition*. We are told in Acts 17 that when Paul was in Thessalonica the Jews became jealous and stirred up the city and the authorities against Paul. And so Paul faced of real opposition. For Paul, one of the very real costs of compassion was the threat of physical danger. He faced it in Philippi and he faced it in Thessalonica.

But there were other costs. In verse 7, Paul writes:

⁷ But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸ Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

Paul didn't just share the message of the Gospel; he shared his very life. He says *we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives*. He gave deeply of himself. He cared for them like *a mother tenderly cares for her own children*. This kind of deep involvement can be messy sometimes. That's a cost.

In Verse 9, Paul continues.

⁹ For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

Paul says that they labored and put up with hardship. They worked *night and day* to not be a burden as they proclaimed the gospel of God. There was the cost of a lot of hard work.

Paul's point in these verses is not to explain the cost of compassion, but we see it. For Paul the cost was physical danger, a deep giving of himself and all the messiness that comes with that as well as a lot of hard work. There was a cost to his compassion.

We will probably never have to face the kind of opposition that Paul did, but none-the-less, there will still be a cost to our compassion. Let me mention just a few.

First, there is the cost of **time and energy**. If we are going to reach out to people it will take time to build those relationships, time to pray, time to serve and it will take emotional energy. This is the imparting of one's life that Paul talks about.

Another cost might be **giving up some things** we are currently doing to make time for this. Most of us live such full and busy lives that we don't have any more space in our lives for another friend. We don't have the capacity to be intentional about making these kinds of friendships. It will require real change in our schedules.

Maybe you like to unwind and watch TV after dinner. You might have to give some of that up so you can walk across the street to have a conversation with your neighbor. Or maybe you are involved in so many church activities that you don't have time for developing friends. You might have to give up some of that good stuff.

Another cost might be **discomfort**. If we are befriending those who are far from God, we might find ourselves in situations that are uncomfortable for us. As we saw last week, Jesus went to a party with Matthew and his friends – people called “tax gatherers and sinners.” They were not having a Bible study at that party. We might find ourselves in some of these situations and it might be out of our comfort zone.

There might be actual **financial** costs. Developing these relationships might involve grabbing lunches or going to a ball game or having people over to dinner or maybe even helping provide for physical needs. That's a cost.

If I were to summarize all of these costs, I think it boils down to this – It is the cost of **laying down my life**. I can't go for this kind of life if I want to protect my time and my money and my energy and my safety and my comfort and my independence. If I want to have a life of truly being used by God in the lives of those who are far from God, I believe that it will only happen as I tell God, “Here's my life, my time, my comfort, my energy; use me. Use me however and whenever You please. My life is yours.” No doubt, that is a steep cost. But don't forget, Jesus said that if we want to save our lives we have to lose them.

There are very few things in life that we will do, and continue to do, if we don't believe that the cost is worth it. And so the question is, “Is the cost of compassion worth it?” As we go on in this passage, though it is clear that Paul paid a price he believed that it was worth it.

The Cost of Compassion Is Worth It (1 Thess. 2:13-19)

Look at verse 13. Paul writes:

When you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea,

The cost of compassion was worth it for Paul because the fruit of it was the changed lives of the Thessalonians. Their lives were transformed. They turned from the worship of idols to the worship of the true and living God (1:9). And so at the end of this chapter, Paul says this:

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.

Paul's missionary travels took him and his companions away from the Thessalonians.

¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan thwarted us. ¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?

We get a picture here of how Paul viewed the Thessalonians. He says that when he stands in a place where he will see things from a true, eternal perspective – the day when Jesus returns – on that day, he says who will be *our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you?* On that day, Paul says, my joy will be in you. The Thessalonians, who became worshippers of God, will be his victor's crown on that day.

But Paul says, not only will he see it that way on that day, this is also how he sees it in the present. Verse 20:

²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

Not only will they be a source of joy for Paul when Christ comes back, they are right now. *You are our glory and joy.*

There was a cost to Paul's compassion – opposition and persecution, hard work, deeply giving of himself. Was it worth it to Paul? Without a doubt. The changed lives of the Thessalonians made it all worth it to Paul.

When we think about the cost of compassion, we must have the right vantage point. Paul's vantage point was the return of Christ – an eternal perspective. That is the vantage point from which we too should weigh the cost. On that day, what will we think? Will we believe that the cost of compassion was worth it?

Sometimes, we forget what an amazing thing it is when God reaches down and touches someone's life and that person turns his or her life over to God. If we forget that, we might forget that the cost of compassion is worth it and so this morning to help us remember, we've asked Ross Hand to come and share his story.

Ross is in his third year here at KSU in graphics design. He is from Lee's Summit, Missouri. He attended Faith sporadically since November of 2006, but consistently starting from April 2007.

Ross Hand's Testimony (You can hear Ross's testimony on the podcast of the sermon at <http://www.faithmanhattan.org/resource/podcast.php>.)

And so I ask you, if God used you to be a part of helping someone come to faith in Christ and have his or her eternal destiny forever changed like Ross' shared, would the cost of compassion be worth it?

The truth is when we look from the vantage point of eternity the time and the energy and the discomfort and any other cost are not really costs, they are, as Bill Hybels says, investments that pay eternal dividends.

We need to understand that there will be a cost to live the kind of lives that we are talking about – lives moved by compassion, intentionally befriending those who are far from God. But we also need to understand that when we stand in eternity, we are going to see clearly the things that truly matter in eternity. And this will be one of them – helping people find their way back to God.

And so in eternity, I have no doubt that you will think the cost was worth it, but I also think that on that day in the nearer future when you look across this room and see that person whom you have helped come to faith in Christ, even on that day, you will think to yourself, the cost of compassion was worth it.