

“Whoever does not carry the cross, and follow me cannot be my disciple” Luke 14: 27

Back in the 70’s my youth group performed an elaborate musical each year which was a ton of work and a pile of fun and especially memorable. One song I remember was entitled, “What Does it Mean to be a Christian?” It is a question I continue to ask.

George Barna, the USA statistics guy, has identified an interesting category among his primary faith groups. The seven groups include 16% who are “Captive Christians”, 2% Jews, 2% Mormons, 2% Pantheists, ½ of 1% Muslims, 11% Skeptics and then this fascinating category called, “Casual Christian” to which 66% of the adult population of the USA identified. (<http://www.barna.org/culture-articles/268-casual-christians-and-the-future-of-america>).

Is there any better oxymoron than that label? When asked what makes causal Christians tick, Barna answered: It offers them life insights if they choose to accept them, gives them a community of relationships if they desire such, fulfills their inner need to have some type of connection with a deity, and provides the image of being a decent, faith-friendly person. He goes on to say:

For Captives, success is obedience to God, as demonstrated by consistently serving Christ and carrying out His commands and principles. For Casuals, success is balancing everything just right so that they are able to maximize their opportunities and joys in life without undermining their perceived relationship with God and others. Stated differently, Casuals are about moderation in all things while Captives are about extreme devotion to their God regardless of the worldly consequences.

If you read Luke 14: 25 – 33, there is nothing casual about what Jesus is demanding of his disciples. He says that there is a huge price tag to this commitment - don’t fool yourselves - so start counting the cost before signing on. That sounds pretty extreme and radical to me. But we don’t like those words. What feels more threatening these days than a “_____extremist” (put in any faith or label you like).

One of the biggest challenges to my faith is how hard it is to tell the difference between those who claim to follow Christ and those who do not. In another study, Barna discovered that at least nine out of ten adults said they are “a good citizen” (97%), “friendly” (94%) and “generous” (90%). At least eight out of ten claimed to “feel at peace” (83%), to be “clear about the meaning and purpose of your life” (81%), and to be “making a positive difference in the world” (80%). Nothing extreme here – but Jesus requires so much more of us who claim to be his disciples.

“Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?” (vs. 34) Can casual Christians become salty again? How casual have I become regarding the extreme teachings of Jesus? How bland and inoffensive and moderate have I made his words to suit my life? The thought is frightening and brings me to my knees. Oh God, what do you truly require of us?

By grace alone,

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