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COUNTING THE COST

When most young people graduate from high school, they have either a plan to go on to higher education or to go to work immediately. Those that go on to college and pursue a career often sacrifice to do this. It takes many years of study to become a doctor, and much sacrifice not only in school, but in their personal lives if they are to succeed. Many have taken out student loans to pursue what they believe to be the path they should take. Often, they do not realize the true cost of their dreams. It takes some students many years to pay off student loans and their debt to reach their goals.

Then there are those that make a determination to be what some would call, "in full-time-ministry." What is meant by this is that they know they have a "call" on their lives to serve Christ in one of the five-fold positions. They feel the tug at their heart and know that God is calling them to this. Many leave their homes to become missionaries overseas.

I have seen young men desire to become Pastors, and they attend seminary to become what they believe God has called them to. Many don't understand what it will take to become ordained by some denominations. Yet, they are willing to pay the price for the Lord.

The Apostle Paul was one such young man. He had been taught under one of the most gifted men of his day, Gamaliel, in the things of God. He knew scripture, yet he did not understand about a "suffering" messiah. He had a zeal for religious things, yet without knowledge until one day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. His entire purpose for living was turned upside down. He went from persecutor of Christians to a protector of the faith in just a few short minutes. He was told by the Lord how much he would suffer to follow Jesus. (Acts 9:16.)

The suffering side of Christianity is rarely spoken about. We hear many messages preached by Pastor and Prophet, Apostle, Evangelist, and Teacher about how God wants to prosper us, and that when we are obedient, we will eat the good of the land.

Just like the college student going after a career has a rude awakening when there are sleepless nights trying to study, and often times of financial hardship, so it is with a Christian that has sold out to Jesus, but they are willing to count the cost.

The suffering includes losing friends that don't agree with you. It means spending hours seeking answers in the Word of God and knowing you must do this to accomplish what God has called you to do. It is putting your flesh to death when it yearns to be like others, but God says no, you have a higher purpose. It is going without at times just to bring the gospel to those that no one wants to go to. You know the ones, the street people, the homeless, the ones that are the "unacceptables" of society. Yet, they know someone must do it.

It is when those in your own family mock you and turn against you, but in spite of their opposition, you know you must walk with God because he will always be there. It is the lonely life, often without many friends because most don't understand why you would sacrifice so much, and even Christians mock you and try to persuade you to not be so radical.

The suffering side of Christianity? Yes, my friends. It is a requirement to fulfill your destiny. It tells in 2 Timothy 3:10-11 of the advice that Paul gave young Timothy, ***“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.”*** Even though Paul had been tortured, dead, shipwrecked and more, God was faithful.

Then in verse 12, Paul sums it up. ***“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”*** All? Yes, all. That is the price we pay when we sell out to God. Most never do this. They don't witness, and they don't give of their time and money to get the gospel to the lost. They may give money for someone else to go, but they don't want to “get their hands dirty” by going themselves.

Sadly, one day each of us will have to stand before God and give an account of what He has given us. Some will lose reward because they gained nothing for the kingdom of God. Others will hear, ***“...Well done, thou good and faithful servant....”*** (Matthew 25:23a). Paul was a servant, determined to do all he could for Jesus. We should all have that same servant's heart that he had. If we did, we could have taken the world for Jesus, but sadly few do. I pray that you are one of the ones that does because you have counted the cost and laid down your plans for God's plans.