

Did Jesus Really Say That?

Hate Your Father and Your Mother

By [Rev. Kevin Labby](#)

Some of Jesus' sayings would look quite striking on those decorative wall hangings you often see at Hobby Lobby. Have you been there? You'll find Scripture beautifully inscribed on reclaimed—or at least reclaimed-looking—wooden plaques. We have one of those pieces hanging above our dining room table. It's lovely. When I walk into the house and turn to the right, I see a portion of God's Word, and it lifts my spirit.

But let's be honest: not all of Jesus' sayings lend themselves to home décor. Take, for instance, "Whoever does not hate father and mother..." Try putting that on a coffee mug. That's not a product you'll find in the Hobby Lobby gift aisle—and I'm quite relieved about that. Or imagine a wall hanging that reads, "If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out." Yes, Jesus said that. But I doubt you'll find it displayed in anyone's living room. And if you do, I sincerely hope that person has reached out for help. We have counselors here at the church who would be glad to walk alongside them.

I share this lightheartedly to make a serious point: Jesus said some things that are not immediately easy to understand. And the reason, quite simply, is that context matters. If you were here last week, you heard Pastor Alex's excellent message—a timely reminder that Scripture must not be taken out of context. Even the most sincere believer can misinterpret God's Word if they neglect its setting. Words must be rightly understood.

Let me offer a personal illustration. When I was a teenager, my grandmother—who was a dairy farmer—once asked me to "pick a bunch of broccoli." I've shared this story with some of you before. As a suburban kid, I took her quite literally. I returned with a Radio Flyer wagon overflowing with broccoli. No exaggeration—it looked like I had kidnapped the entire green cast of *VeggieTales* and stuffed them into that wagon.

My grandmother didn't say a word. She stayed up until two in the morning blanching and freezing all of it. What she meant by "a bunch" was a handful. What I understood was "as much as you can possibly carry." The difference in interpretation had real consequences.

That's why I'm so excited about this new sermon series, and I hope you are too. It's titled *Did Jesus Really Say That?* Over the next several weeks, we'll explore some of Jesus' more perplexing statements—sayings that have confused many, and perhaps even you. Sometimes the confusion stems from the wording itself; other times, it's because the verse has been lifted out of its context.

So we'll do two things in this series. First, we'll seek to understand what Jesus actually meant. By the end of each Sunday, you'll walk away with a clearer, more faithful grasp of His words—even the ones that seem wild at first glance. Second, we'll model how to interpret Scripture rightly. We'll practice reading the Bible in context, with care and reverence.

And today, we begin with Luke 14:25–27. As we open the text, let us remember: these are not just ancient words. They are the very words of God.

A Reflection on Luke 14:25–27: The Cost of Discipleship

This meditation is inspired by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel writer Luke. In verse 25, we read:

Now great crowds accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

These are sobering words—what many have called a “hard saying” of Jesus. Let us begin by seeking the Spirit's guidance in rightly dividing this Word.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who spoke these words with divine authority. We affirm that every word He uttered is truth, for He is God—unchanging and faithful, just as You are. As He spoke Your Word, He entrusted it to us through Your Spirit. And now, by Your grace, may that same Spirit illuminate these words for us. May they take deep root in our hearts and minds, shaping how we live—even in light of difficult teachings. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Upon reading this passage, one may immediately sense a tension. Jesus appears to command hatred toward one's own family—father and mother, spouse and children, siblings—and even toward oneself. This seems to contradict other biblical teachings:

- The fifth commandment instructs us to honor our father and mother, which surely includes loving them.
- Marriage is portrayed as a sacred reflection of Christ's love for the Church. Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church—sacrificially, presenting her radiant and unblemished.
- Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and surely that includes members of our own household.
- Scripture warns that one who fails to care for his own family is worse than an unbeliever.
- And how can we love others as ourselves if we do not first possess a godly love for our own life?

So which is it? Does Jesus call us to love or to hate?

The answer lies in understanding the context—both scriptural and cultural.

1. Scriptural Context

This passage follows immediately after the Parable of the Great Banquet. In that parable, a man prepares a lavish feast and invites many guests. Though the invitations are sent and the preparations complete, those invited offer excuses: one has purchased land, another has acquired oxen, another has just married. Each is preoccupied with legitimate, even commendable responsibilities—but they are too entangled to respond to the invitation.

This parable illustrates God's invitation to restored fellowship. Many decline, not out of malice, but because the ordinary demands of life obscure the urgency of the call. In response, the master turns to those who have nothing to offer—the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. The feast is free, but to partake, one must possess the right priorities. Those with little are less encumbered and more receptive to the kingdom.

2. Cultural and Linguistic Context

Jesus spoke these words within a specific historical and cultural framework. The language He used carried nuances that may not translate directly into modern English. Just as the word “bunch” can mean different things to different speakers, so too can expressions like “hate” carry varied connotations.

In Semitic usage, “hate” often conveyed a sense of preference or priority rather than emotional hostility. To “hate” one's family in this context means to

subordinate even the most cherished relationships to the call of Christ. It is not a call to emotional rejection, but to radical allegiance.

In sum, Jesus is not contradicting the command to love. He is clarifying the cost of discipleship. To follow Him is to place Him above all else—above family, above comfort, above self. It is to bear one's cross, to relinquish competing loyalties, and to embrace the kingdom with undivided heart.

May we, by the Spirit's help, receive this Word not with fear, but with faith. And may it shape our lives in view of eternity.

The Cost of Discipleship: Reordering Allegiances in the Kingdom of God

In this parable, Jesus intensifies a theme found throughout his teaching: the blessedness of the poor—those who possess both need and the awareness of that need, which draws them into the kingdom of God. This sets the stage for his striking statement that entrance into the kingdom requires a radical reordering of allegiances, even to the point of “hating” one's father and mother, brothers and sisters, and so forth.

Jesus is not promoting hostility or emotional rejection. Rather, he is emphasizing that salvation, while freely offered to all, demands a profound reorientation of the heart. To accept the invitation to God's banquet—to enter the kingdom and be reconciled to God—requires that every other loyalty be subordinated. The invitation is free; discipleship, however, is costly. It transforms everything.

To understand this, we must consider the biblical use of the word “hate.” In English, we intuitively grasp that words like “love” carry different meanings depending on context. One might say, “I love my wife” and “I love pizza” in the same breath, and no one would be confused. We recognize that the intensity and nature of love differ across relationships and objects.

Similarly, Scripture employs idiomatic expressions to convey priority rather than emotion. When God declares in Romans 9, quoting the Old Testament, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” the language reflects divine choice, not animosity. It is a statement of preference, not hostility. We use comparable expressions in everyday speech—for instance, “I hate dipping my wings in ranch dressing because I'm a blue cheese person.” This is not a declaration of deep-seated disdain for ranch, but a hyperbolic way of expressing preference.

Jesus uses this idiom to underscore the supremacy of allegiance to God. He is not commanding enmity toward family. Indeed, even in his final moments on the cross, Jesus cared for his mother, entrusting her to the beloved disciple. His life and teachings consistently affirm the importance of honoring and caring for family.

What Jesus demands is that our love for him be so great, so primary, that all other loves—even good and noble ones—are clearly secondary by comparison. This is the essence of discipleship.

Luke 14:25 notes that “great crowds accompanied him.” At the height of his popularity, when thousands were following him—having witnessed healings and heard compelling teachings—Jesus deliberately speaks words that would thin the ranks. He challenges the crowd with hard truths, forcing a decision: Is their following merely superficial, driven by intrigue and admiration? Or are they prepared to embrace the full cost of discipleship?

To follow Jesus is not merely to be part of the crowd. It is to make a personal, costly choice. As he says, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” This is a call to lay down one’s life, to surrender all.

Salvation is free—Christ has paid the price. But discipleship demands everything. To receive the gift of reconciliation with God is to commit to loving Christ above all else. His words are intentionally provocative: even our deepest loves must take second place. This is the radical call of the kingdom.

A Reflection on Discipleship: The Call of Christ in Verse 27

In verse 27, Jesus speaks with striking clarity and vividness, offering a glimpse into what He is about to accomplish for His people. His words are not merely poetic; they are prophetic, pointing toward the path He Himself will walk—a path marked by suffering, humiliation, and ultimately, death. Just as Christ took up His cross and journeyed to Golgotha, so too must we be prepared to take up our own cross and follow Him. This call is not limited to the crucifixion itself; it encompasses the entire journey of self-denial, endurance, and transformation. To follow Christ is to die to self and to be raised into new life in Him.

But what does this truly entail? Why does Jesus frame discipleship in such stark terms? What does He desire for us to understand about the nature of following Him?

1. Christ Reigns Above All

The first and most foundational truth Jesus emphasizes is this: to be His disciple is to acknowledge His supreme authority. Christ is not an accessory to our lives, a seasoning we add to enhance our personal flavor. He is Lord of all. As Paul writes to the Colossians, all things were created in Christ and for Christ; all things hold together under His sovereign rule and radiant glory.

In many cultures around the world—and even within certain religious subcultures in America—this truth is not theoretical. Choosing to follow Christ

can result in profound personal cost: families may disown believers, inheritance may be forfeited, social standing may be lost, and the possibility of marriage within one's community may vanish. In such contexts, believers must lean wholly on the sufficiency of Christ and find their new family in the church.

While most of us in America may not face such overt rejection, the cost of discipleship is still real. It may manifest more quietly: in strained relationships, in the subtle mockery of coworkers, in the disapproval of parents who do not understand the priorities shaped by faith. Choosing Christ may mean reordering one's schedule, elevating worship and the study of Scripture above other cultural allegiances—sports, social engagements, or professional ambitions. For many, this choice is deeply personal and painful. Some among us know this cost intimately.

2. We Cannot Love Christ Fully Without His Help

The second truth is humbling: we are incapable of loving Christ as He deserves apart from His enabling grace. When Jesus speaks hard truths—whether in this passage or in the Sermon on the Mount—the disciples often respond with bewilderment: “Who then can be saved?” They recognize the impossibility of meeting such a standard.

Indeed, none of us can love God perfectly. Only Christ offered flawless obedience to the Father, with a heart wholly undivided. The law of God, the teachings of Jesus, and His difficult sayings expose our need and drive us to prayer. The disciples themselves began as timid and fearful men. Yet as they grew in their awareness of their own need and in their understanding of God's love, they became men who loved Jesus to the very end. Jesus loved them to the end. Paul poured out his life for Christ. Peter accepted a death he would never have chosen on his own. The Holy Spirit accomplished a profound work in them—and what is impossible with man is possible with God.

3. Discipleship Is Progress, Not Perfection

Finally, Jesus' call is not a summons to instant perfection, but to faithful direction. True discipleship is a lifelong journey of reordering our loves and our lives to reflect the glory of God. Growth in grace involves learning to place all things in their proper order. If we have elevated something—even something good—above God, it must be dethroned. If it is an idol opposed to the things of God, it must be removed entirely.

This transformation does not happen overnight. Through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, prayer, fellowship, and discipleship, our hearts are gradually reshaped. We learn to love rightly, to live faithfully, and to follow Christ more nearly.

The Paradox of Discipleship: Loving Others Best by Loving Christ Most

God has initiated a good work in us, and He has promised to bring it to completion. This divine commitment invites us not only into transformation but into peace with our true identity. In the ancient Near Eastern context, identity was inseparable from family; one's very existence was defined by familial ties. There was no conceptual framework for a life lived apart from one's kin.

Thus, when Jesus declares that one must "hate" father and mother in comparison to allegiance to the Kingdom of God, He is not advocating animosity but reordering priorities. He is challenging the prevailing definition of self—one rooted in relational proximity to others or societal constructs—and replacing it with a new foundation: identity in Him.

Today, many of us seek self-definition through achievements—academic, professional, athletic—or through the curated personas we present on social media. When these external markers falter, we feel diminished, as though something essential has been lost. Yet Christ's message is clear: such reactions reveal misplaced identity. If anything becomes more central to our sense of self than Christ, it has assumed a role that belongs to Him alone.

This is not merely a rebuke; it is a gracious invitation. When Jesus becomes the ultimate source of our identity—the defining relationship of our lives—a paradox unfolds: we begin to love others best by loving Him most.

This is the heart of discipleship. Jesus does not call us to love our families less, but to love them rightly. In prioritizing Him, we are empowered to forgive, to extend grace, and to love sacrificially. We forgive not because we are noble, but because we have been forgiven. We love not because others are perfect, but because we have been loved in our imperfection.

Parents, you will never love your children more than when you love God most. In doing so, you will see your children not as extensions of your reputation, but as souls in need of a Savior. You will resist the temptation to idolize them or burden them with expectations they cannot bear. Instead, you will model grace, helping them navigate failure with the assurance of divine mercy.

Jesus welcomed children, saying, "Let the little ones come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." God desires your children to come home to Him. Your role is not to perfect them, but to guide them toward the One who loves them perfectly.

Let us close with this: for believers, this is a sobering reminder. Christ did not call us to a comfortable Christianity, but to costly discipleship. True discipleship

involves bearing a cross—not seeking suffering for its own sake, but embracing the path of obedience even when it is difficult.

For skeptics, consider this: Jesus is not merely a gentle moralist whose sayings adorn the walls of our grandparents' homes. He is a teacher unlike any other, whose words disrupt and redefine. Even if you do not yet believe, He is worthy of your attention, your study, and your listening.

And for the Church, we must not dilute the call to follow Christ. We are called to love God by loving others, to make disciples who make a difference. Individuals who have walked faithfully with Christ—did not do so by remaining comfortable. They did so by embracing the cost, and in doing so, they bore witness to the beautiful paradox: when we love Jesus most, we love others best.

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