

Sample Sessions

September 4, 2016

Click any of the links below to go directly to the preferred age group:

[- Grades K-2](#)

[- Grades 3-4](#)

[- Multi-Age](#)

[- Tweens](#)

[- Youth](#)

[- Young Adult](#)

[- Adult](#)

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Grades (K) 1–2



2016–2017

Semicontinuous

Jer. 18:1–11

Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18

Complementary

Deut. 30:15–20

Ps. 1

Phlm 1–21

Luke 14:25–33

Loving and Following

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will wonder about Jesus' hope that his disciples will love him with all their hearts and what that means for them.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–33

Focus on Your Teaching

Children receive a glimpse of God's love when they are loved by those around them. Ideally, they experience such love from birth as they are held in the loving arms of parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. If they have not had such care, they can begin to learn of God's love from you and other caring adults at church. As children grow in the awareness that God's love for them comes through Jesus Christ and that this love is deeper and stronger than any human love, it becomes possible for them to respond with a disciple's heart.

Life-giving God, keep me so deeply attuned to your love for me that I cannot help but offer myself as your disciple. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- small table or large box
- Bible
- cross
- battery-powered candle
- green cloth
- Color Pack 1, 2, 28
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils
- Singing the Feast, 2016–2017*; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, markers, scissors, glue sticks, dowels or sturdy plastic straws
- option 2: writing paper, pencils, materials for project chosen
- option 3: plain paper plates or card stock, 18" x 12" construction paper, scissors, markers, glue sticks

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using option 2 in Responding, be sure to secure any permission necessary for the project you choose. If you are using option 3, cut 18" x 4" rectangles of construction paper, one per child. Place a green cloth in the center of your meeting space. Arrange the Bible, cross, and candle on the cloth.

Welcome children as they arrive and invite each one to write his or her name on Color Pack 1, using a marker. If possible, hang the poster where it can remain in place for several weeks.

Gather learners around the candle and light it. Point out the green cloth, telling children that the church uses this color during the time of the year called Ordinary Time (or season after Pentecost). Green reminds God's people to keep growing—just like green plants grow—as Jesus' disciples. Pray aloud, having learners repeat each phrase:

Dear God, / we are here today / to learn, / to pray, / and to praise. / Thank you for bringing us together. / Amen.

Form pairs and have partners stand face-to-face. Designate one child in each pair as the leader and the other as the follower. The leader will make facial expressions and arm movements that the follower copies. After a few moments, have partners trade roles. Gather the group and discuss:

- ✠ What helped you be a good follower?
- ✠ When have you learned how to do something new by following someone's example?

Today's focus scripture is a challenging passage; adults spend a lifetime seeking to understand it. For children this age, verses 25–26 form the heart of the session. They will have opportunities to engage the entire text when they are older.

If some children are hearing about Jesus for the first time, take a moment to explain that Jesus is God's Son—God's best gift of love for us. Jesus came to earth to teach us about God's love that will never end. You might want to have a child's storybook or two about Jesus' birth and life to loan to families who are new to the church.

EXPLORING

Open a Bible to Luke 14 and introduce today's Bible story about a time when Jesus was teaching people how to live in God's ways. Jesus' followers are called disciples. A disciple is someone who follows a leader. The disciples follow Jesus so they can learn how to live in God's ways.

One of the things Jesus' disciples learn is how much Jesus loves them. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Jesus' Love for Me) and pencils. Work together to fill in the blanks. Invite learners to write their own ideas about Jesus' love on the back of the sheet. Ask volunteers to read their ideas. Explain that since Jesus loves us so much, we have plenty of love to give back to Jesus and to other people.

Ask a child to hold up Color Pack 2 and invite learners to imagine they are part of this group listening to Jesus while you read aloud Luke 14:25–26, CEV:

Large crowds were walking along with Jesus, when he turned and said: You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life.

Invite learners to comment on the facial expressions of the people listening to Jesus in the picture on Color Pack 2: Who looks happy? Who looks confused? Comment that Jesus' words may be confusing to them, too. Assure them that Jesus wants them to love their families and friends, and Jesus certainly wants their families to love them. It may help to explain it this way: Jesus loves us with God's love—the biggest love possible. This is the most important love in our lives. Jesus says it is this enormous love that makes it possible for us to love other people. Discuss:

- ✪ Why do you think Jesus says that loving him is so important?
- ✪ What question would you like to ask Jesus about this love?
- ✪ How do Christians show Jesus that they love him? (Some responses include: learning from him by reading Bible stories, talking with family members about God's love, welcoming other people to church, trusting God to forgive them, worshiping, and praying.)

RESPONDING

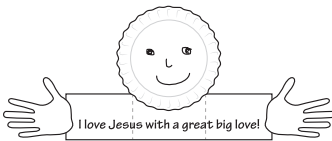
Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Heart Spinner** Children can imagine the ongoing nature of Jesus' love for them and their love for Jesus as they play with a heart spinner. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Heart Spinner) and help learners follow the instructions on the sheet to make heart spinners. After they have finished, invite children to sit in a circle with their spinners. As you discuss these questions, invite learners to spin their spinners as they respond: What does it mean to love Jesus more than anything else? What might Jesus' love help you do?

EASY
PREP

Be sure to check with your pastor or other church leaders as necessary for approval of the project you plan to do.

EASY
PREP



- 2. Living as Disciples** Children can experience what it means to draw on Jesus' love for them to help them serve. Invite learners to dream of all the ways they might practice being disciples by using the power of Jesus' love to help others. (If they need ideas, suggest a gently used toy or book drive for a local agency, canned food drive, or making cards for people who are sick or lonely. This does not have to be a "big event.") After learners choose one project, plan how to carry it out. If needed, draft a simple note that children can copy and take home to explain the project to their families. As you work together, talk about how serving is one way disciples can love and follow Jesus.
- 3. Loving Arms** Children can wonder about their love for Jesus as they create a "loving arms" image. Give each child a plain paper plate or a 9" circle of card stock. Guide the children, following these steps: Add hair and facial features to the paper plate to create self-portraits. Give each child one 18" x 4" piece of construction paper for the arms. Glue the head to the center of the arms. Trace around hands on a separate sheet of paper and cut out the tracings. Glue one hand to the end of each arm. Fold the arms in toward the center so the hands overlap like a hug. Open the arms and write, "I love Jesus with a great big love!" across the inside of the arms. After all have finished, ask the children to sit in a circle and hold their artwork in their laps so the faces are looking into the circle. Ask learners to imagine all the ways that disciples might show Jesus that they love him with a great big love. (For example: doing loving and caring things for others, telling people about God's love, inviting other people to church, praying.) As children respond, have them fold in the arms on their artwork, as if they are giving Jesus a hug. Encourage learners to hang their artwork in a place at home where it can remind them of their great big love for Jesus.

Do Lord, O Do Lord

Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me,
 Way beyond the blue.

Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray.
 Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray.
 Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray,
 Way beyond the blue.

Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray,
 Way beyond the blue.

CLOSING

Gather the children around the worship center. Display Color Pack 28 and read aloud the words. Invite learners to sing "Do Lord, O Do Lord" (track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017). After singing, encourage each learner to tell one thing he or she has learned about Jesus' love.

Move from child to child, touching each one lightly on the shoulder and offering this blessing:


"(Name), Jesus loves you and blesses you with a gigantic love. Let his light shine in your life. Amen."

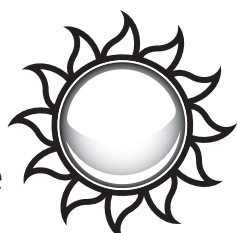
Jesus' Love for Me

Fill in the blanks using
the words at the bottom
of the page.

The  may be _____,
but Jesus' love is _____ er.

The  may be _____,
But Jesus' love is _____ er.

The  may be _____, but Jesus'
love is _____ger.

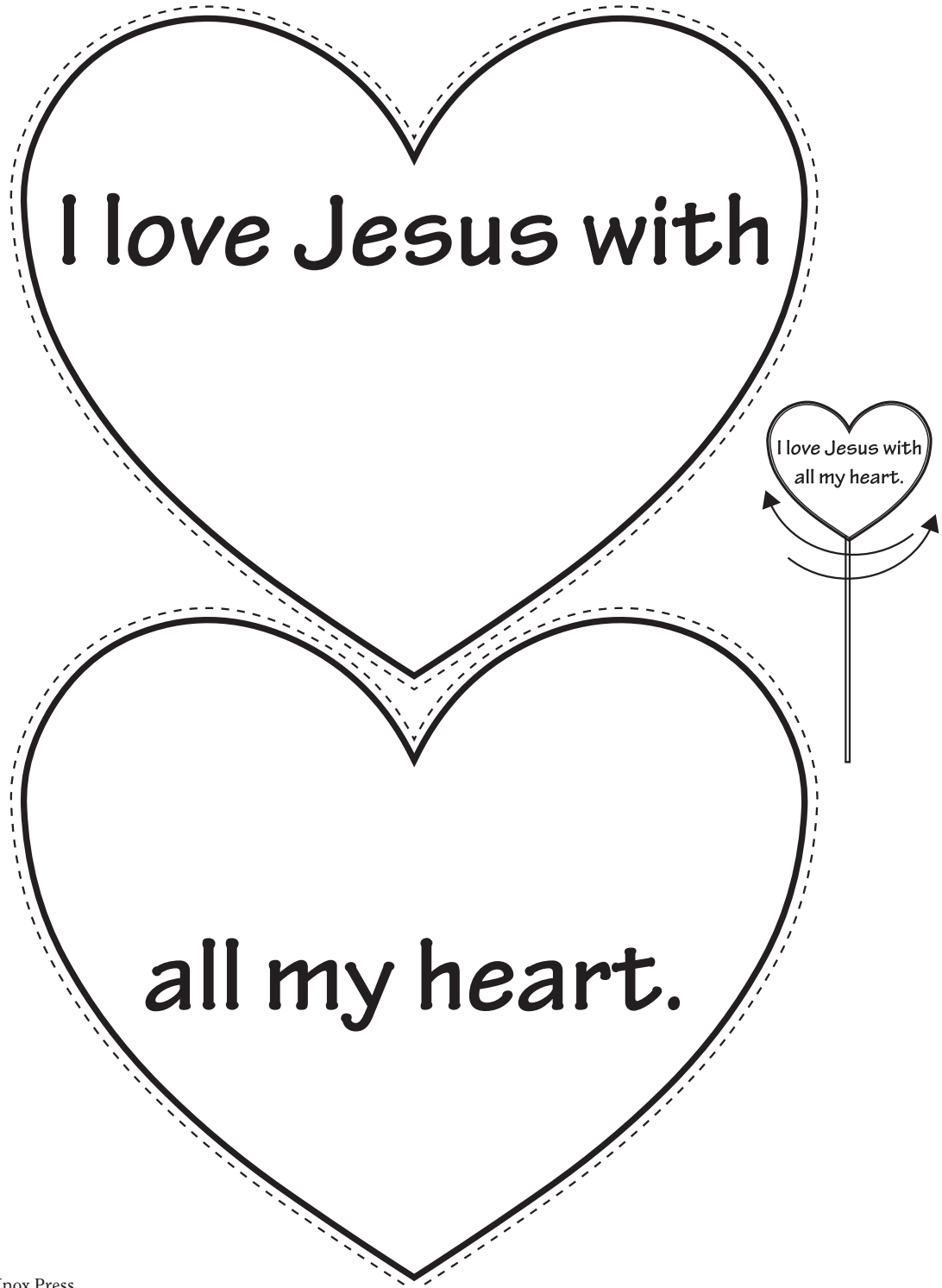
The  may be _____,
But Jesus' love shines _____er.

Words to choose from: *bright, high, deep, big.*

On the back of this page, write your own idea of what
Jesus' love is like!

Heart Spinner

Directions: Color the hearts and cut them out. Put glue on the back of each heart. Place the two hearts back-to-back, sandwiching a thin 12" dowel or sturdy plastic drinking straw between them. When dry, hold the dowel or straw between your palms and slide your palms back and forth. The heart will spin and you will see the message!



Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Grades 3–4



2016–2017

Semicontinuous
Jer. 18:1–11
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18
Complementary
Deut. 30:15–20
Ps. 1
Phlm 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

Counting the Cost

**Goal for
the Session**

Third- and fourth-graders will consider Jesus' call to discipleship and think about making choices that help them follow him.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–33

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- Christ candle, matches or lighter
- Singing the Feast*,
- 2016–2017; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 4, 33
- scissors, pens
- tape
- newsprint
- sticky notes
- building blocks
- pennies
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- pencils, markers

For Responding

- option 1: Color Pack 4, drawing paper, crayons or markers
- option 2: newsprint or markerboard, marker
- option 3: oven-bake clay, toothpicks, baking sheet

A *Christ candle* is a tall white candle with a cross or other Christian symbol on it. It is a reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, promises to be present when Christians gather. You can make a Christ candle by drawing a cross on a wax or battery-powered candle.

Focus on Your Teaching

Third- and fourth-graders have begun to understand the limits of resources available to them. They may have found that the time and energy they want to put into learning a sport or an instrument limits their free time. How they spend allowance money affects other choices they make. This session strives to help children consider how following Jesus is a choice that requires reorienting one's life so the focus is less on self and more on God and others. Discipleship is a call to focus energy and resources in faithful ways.

Giving God, help me to remember the costs and joys of discipleship and to live faithfully through the choices I make. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, tape together Color Pack 1, 2, and 3 to form the Discipleship Tree. Cut the strips of boxes with leaves from Color Pack 3, and cut the leaf boxes apart. Save these leaf cutouts to use in upcoming sessions. Gather building blocks in various sizes, perhaps borrowing from the church nursery. Bring twenty-five pennies for every three or four learners. If you are using option 3 in Responding, purchase oven-bake clay from a craft store and make arrangements to use an oven.

Greet learners as they arrive. Ask them to arrange the green cloth in the center of your learning space and place the Christ candle, Bible, and several leaf cutouts on it.

Gather around the candle and recall that Ordinary Time (or Season after Pentecost) is a time when Christians seek to grow as Jesus' disciples. Invite learners to take a leaf cutout, write their name on it, and tape it to the Discipleship Tree.

Light the candle as a sign of Jesus' presence.

Pray aloud, asking the children to repeat each phrase:

Dear God / be our guide / as we learn more about you / and how to follow / in the ways of Jesus. / Amen.

All: Amen! (Clap twice.)

Extinguish the candle.

Form groups of three or four. Give each group twenty-five pennies. Show them the building blocks and explain that short blocks are one cent each and tall blocks are three cents each (or other pricing that fits the blocks you have). Explain that each group will purchase materials and build the tallest tower it can in three minutes. You will be the block seller. Applaud the group with the tallest tower. Discuss:

- ✿ How did your group choose which blocks to buy?
- ✿ Do you wish you had made different choices? Why or why not?

Tell learners that the Bible story today is about making choices.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and ask the children to open them to the beginning of the New Testament. Remind them that the four books at the beginning of the New Testament are called the Gospels; each Gospel tells about Jesus' life and teachings. In unison, name the four Gospels (Matthew Mark, Luke, John). Say that the Bible reading for today is found in Luke. Set Bibles aside.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Be My Disciple). Ask three volunteer readers to lead the group in the choral reading. Explain that this is a challenging teaching, and that Christians spend a lifetime trying to fully understand it. Assure learners that their understanding will grow over the years too. Discuss:

- ✿ What would you like to ask Jesus about verse 26?
- ✿ What does Jesus say about building a tower? Does this help you understand what it means to make the choice to be Jesus' disciple? How so?
- ✿ What does Jesus say about preparing for a battle? Does this help you understand what it means to make the choice to follow the ways of Jesus? How so?

Invite learners to tell what they know about being Jesus' disciple. Display Color Pack 4, affirming that every Christian, young or old, is a disciple. Brainstorm things that disciples do, recording the ideas on newsprint. Add ideas from the sidebar as needed. Together, imagine the ways Jesus' first disciples might have done these things. Ask the children to name ways that Jesus' disciples today do these things. Ask:

- ✿ Which is your favorite thing to do as Jesus' disciple? Invite each learner to write his or her response on a sticky note and place it on Color Pack 4.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Following Jesus), pencils, and markers. Read the Bible verse in unison. Wonder together about the meaning of the phrase "carry your own cross and come with me." Ask:

- ✿ Do you think Jesus means that every Christian should carry a big wood or metal cross all the time? Why or why not?
- ✿ What else might Jesus mean by these words?

Ask: "Since disciples today can't see Jesus, how can we follow him?" Allow a few quiet moments for the children to write or draw their ideas about this in the space provided on the resource sheet. Invite volunteers to show their responses and tell about them.

Third- and fourth-graders are concrete thinkers, though some older ones in the group may be beginning to develop abstract reasoning skills. Do not expect learners to fully understand the comparisons Jesus presents in these verses. Accept all responses and questions.

Some things disciples do:

- Study the Bible.
- Pray.
- Ask questions about their faith.
- Help sick people.
- Help hungry people.
- Comfort sad or lonely people.
- Tell others about Jesus.
- Teach about God's love.
- Try to follow Jesus' teachings.
- Invite others to church.

RESPONDING

Mark the options you will use:

- 1. Discipleship Display** Third- and fourth-graders can learn more about being Jesus' disciples as they prepare a display. Look again at Color Pack 4 and the sticky notes added in Exploring. Ask each child to choose one activity that he or she will practice in the coming week. Distribute drawing paper and crayons or markers and have learners draw pictures of themselves doing their chosen activities. Create a display with Color Pack 4 in the center and the drawings around it. Option: Place the display where others in the church will see it. Set out materials and encourage church members to add their drawings to the display.
- 2. Weigh the Costs** Encourage the children to think more deeply about Jesus' words in Luke 14:25–33 and the choices they might make to follow him. On newsprint or markerboard, draw a large "T." Ask learners to name activities that are priorities for them, such as learning a sport, musical instrument, or school subject. Choose one activity and write it across the top of the T. Invite learners to name costs for that activity, such as equipment purchases, lessons, time, or energy. List these on the left side of the center line. Invite the children to name benefits or rewards of this activity and list them on the right side of the center line. Repeat these steps to create a second chart for following Jesus as a disciple. Afterward, allow a quiet moment for children to think about a choice they might make to help them follow Jesus.
- 3. Pocket Crosses** Children can create small crosses as a tactile reminder of Luke 14:27. Following the instructions on the package of oven-bake clay, guide children in molding a cross about 2 or 3 inches tall. Decorate the crosses by using different colors of clay or by making lines in the clay with a toothpick. Bake the crosses according to package instructions. (You may need to do this at home and bring finished crosses next week.) Invite learners to touch their crosses and say Luke 14:27. Encourage them to say this verse whenever they touch the cross.

EASY
PREP

Do Lord, O Do Lord

Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do remember me,
 Way beyond the blue.

Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray.
 Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray.
 Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
 I know I need to pray,
 Way beyond the blue.

Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray.
 Do Lord, O do Lord,
 O do help me to pray,
 Way beyond the blue.

CLOSING

Gather around the Christ candle and light it. Show Color Pack 33 and invite learners to sing "Do Lord, O Do Lord" (track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017). Ask learners to tell what they will remember about following Jesus from the Bible story today.

Pray aloud, asking children to echo your words and actions:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, (thumbs point behind you)

Today, (hands point down by your side)

And forever! (fingers point ahead)

Thank you, God!

Be My Disciple

Reader 1:

²⁵Large crowds were walking along with Jesus, when he turned and said:

Reader 2:

²⁶You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life.

All:

Jesus says, “Be my disciple.”

Reader 3:

²⁷You cannot be my disciple unless you carry your own cross and come with me.

All:

Jesus says, “Be my disciple.”

Reader 1:

²⁸Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. What is the first thing you will do? Won't you sit down and figure out how much it will cost and if you have enough money to pay for it? ²⁹Otherwise, you will start building the tower, but not be able to finish. Then everyone who sees what is happening will laugh at you. ³⁰They will say, “You started building, but could not finish the job.”

All:

Jesus says, “Be my disciple.”

Reader 2:

³¹What will a king do if he has only ten thousand soldiers to defend himself against a king who is about to attack him with twenty thousand soldiers? Before he goes out to battle, won't he first sit down and decide if he can win? ³²If he thinks he won't be able to defend himself, he will send messengers and ask for peace while the other king is still a long way off.

Reader 3:

³³So then, you cannot be my disciple unless you give away everything you own.

All:

Jesus says, “Be my disciple.”

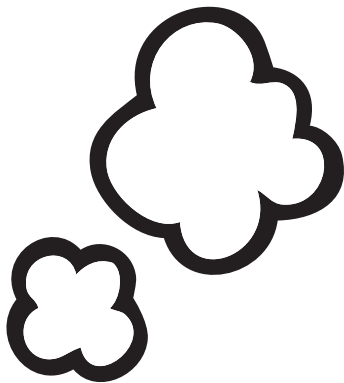
–Luke 14:25–33, CEV

September 4, 2016
Counting the Cost

Grades 3–4
Resource Sheet 2

Following Jesus

Jesus said: “You cannot be my
disciple unless you carry your
own cross and come with me.”
—Luke 14:27, CEV



What are some ways you might “carry your own cross” and follow Jesus? Write or draw your ideas in the bubble.

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Multi-Age
Grades K-6



2016–2017

Semicontinuous

Jer. 18:1–11

Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18

Complementary

Deut. 30:15–20

Ps. 1

Phlm 1–21

Luke 14:25–33

Disciples and Followers

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will consider what loving Jesus with all their hearts means for them.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–38

Focus on Your Teaching

Most children are tied closely to their parents and other family members. Expecting them to forsake their families is not realistic. Therefore, verse 26 is not emphasized in the story, but making choices is. The younger children are beginning to make choices: what to wear to school, whether to play a team sport, who to be friends with. The oldest children have made many choices and are now facing even bigger ones about their faith and what interests to pursue. In this session, they are reminded that Jesus calls for decisions too.

*God, some choices weigh heavily on my mind. Others are made in a flash.
Prompt me to keep my love for Jesus at the forefront. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- Bible
- offering basket
- candle and matches or battery-operated candle
- Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 27, 28
- Discipleship Tree and leaves from Color Pack 2, 3, 4
- tape
- Resource Sheet 1

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2; pencils; *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017; CD player
- option 2: oven-bake clay or Model Magic, toothpicks
- option 3: Resource Sheet 2, card stock, index cards, stapler, markers
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017; CD player; Color Pack 28

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, find one of the Bible translations recommended in Exploring, in print or on a Web site. Create the Discipleship Tree using Color Pack 2, 3, and 4. Cut out the squares with leaves.

Greet the children as they arrive. Invite the early arrivals to help set up the worship table. Place a green cloth on the table. On it place a Bible, an offering basket, and a candle. Place the Discipleship Tree and leaves from Color Pack 2, 3, and 4 nearby.

When everything is ready, gather at the worship table. Point to the green cloth. Explain that it indicates that the church year season is Ordinary Time. Tell about this season, using the information on Color Pack 1.

Light the candle.

Teach the signs for *glory* and *God* shown on Color Pack 27. Sing “Glory to God” (track 9 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017) and sign these words as they are sung.

Pray, inviting the children to echo each phrase after you:

Dear God / be our guide / as we seek / to learn more about you / and how to follow / in the ways of Jesus. / Amen.

All: Amen! (Clap twice.)

Glory to God

Glory to God,
 Glory to God,
 Glory to God in the highest!

Repeat three times

A *parable* is a story of comparison that teaches a religious truth. Jesus used parables to teach about God.

Ask learners if they have ever played follow the leader. Begin with everyone standing in a circle. The children are to do whatever the leader (you) does. Begin with simple motions, such as a hand on top of your head or your legs apart, and progress to more difficult movements, such as combining two motions. After a few moments, ask:

✧ To play this game, what did you need to do?

Encourage their answers and help them see that they had to pay close attention to what the leader was doing and saying to be good followers. Ask:

✧ Who are some leaders you follow?

After they have named some leaders, explain that the Bible story today is about Jesus as our leader.

Exploring

Ask a child to get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the Gospel of Luke. Point out that the Gospels are at the beginning of the New Testament. If necessary, have the child find Luke in the Table of Contents. Then ask a child to turn to chapter 14. Keep the Bible open to Luke 14 as you tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Follow Me). Ask:

✧ What did Jesus want the people to know about being his follower?

✧ What do you think the people thought after Jesus told the two parables?

Explain that people who follow Jesus are called *disciples*, a name for more than the twelve apostles who traveled with him everywhere. This means that they can be disciples. With this definition and having heard the story, provide another hearing of the focus scripture as found in Luke 14:25–33. Read from a translation in contemporary language, such as the Common English Bible, the Contemporary English Version, or Today's English Version (the Good News Bible). Following verses 26, 27, 30, and 33, prompt the children to say this refrain together: Jesus says, "Be my disciple."

Conclude Exploring by noting that being a disciple or follower of Jesus means we have to think about what we do and whether our choices follow the way that Jesus teaches.

Responding

Offer at least two options so the children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest children who can work on their own.

- 1. Disciples in Development** Although the children may be at various stages of faith development, they can encourage one another to move forward. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Disciples in Development) and pencils. Explain that this activity is to help them think about ways they can be more faithful disciples or followers of Jesus. Read the directions at the top of the resource sheet together. Play music softly as they work, something like "Music over Water" (track 17 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017). When everyone has finished, invite volunteers to tell one thing they will do to follow Jesus in the coming week.

**EASY
 PREP**

If two or more children need help reading the resource sheet, work with them in a small group as the others complete the sheet on their own.

2. **Pocket Cross** Children will make small crosses as a reminder to follow Jesus. Follow the directions on the package of oven-bake clay. Have the children mold crosses between 2 and 3 inches tall. Provide toothpicks for them to inscribe words, such as “follow me” or “I am with you” on their crosses. Bake the crosses. If necessary, do this at home and return them to the children at the next session. Together, memorize Luke 14:27, using the Bible translation from Exploring.

Option: Make the crosses with Model Magic, which does not have to be baked and will harden by air-drying.

3. **Disciple Book** To help the children think more about what faithful disciples do, make “A Disciple . . .” books. Begin by brainstorming all the things a disciple of Jesus might do to follow the ways Jesus taught. They may include: pray to God, give money to the church, read the Bible every day. (See Resource Sheet 2 [Disciples in Development] for ideas.) To construct the book, begin with a 12" x 4" piece of card stock. Fold up about 4" from the bottom of the 12" strip. Staple along the sides to make a pocket. Above the pocket, print “A Disciple . . .” Give each child three or four index cards (3" x 5"). On each one, front and back, they complete the sentence at the top of the pocket holder with words or illustrations. For example: “prays every day.” Slip the index cards into the pocket as they are finished.

**I’m Gonna Live
So God Can Use Me**

I’m gonna *live* so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I’m gonna *live* so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!

I’m gonna *work* . . .

I’m gonna *share* . . .

I’m gonna *care* . . .

4. **Following Jesus in Song** “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 28 and track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017), sung at the close of this session, is a musical reminder of how to follow Jesus. After singing it, talk together about how they might live so God can use them.

Closing

Gather at the worship table. Light or turn on the candle.

Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 28 and track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017).

Invite children to name ways to follow Jesus. Print their ideas on a few leaves and tape them to the Discipleship Tree.

Close with this benediction:

(Child’s name), *be a faithful disciple of Jesus this week. God be with you.*

Tell the children you hope to see them next week.

Follow Me
based on Luke 14:25-33

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. But along the way he had dinner in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. He taught people about God's love by telling them stories called parables. He visited his friends, Mary and Martha, in a town called Bethany. He told people not to worry because God was always with them.

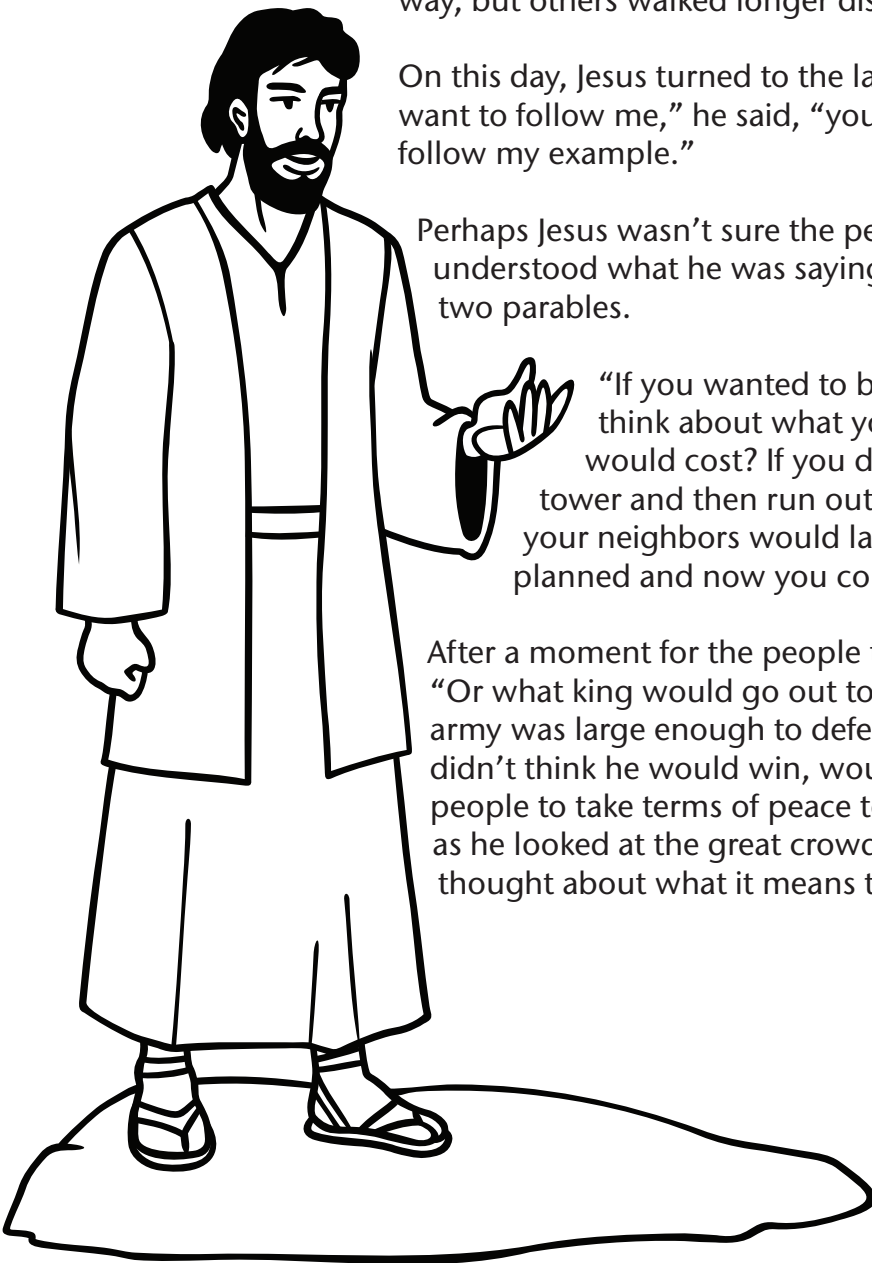
As Jesus and the 12 disciples walked from village to village, crowds of people, large crowds, walked with them. Some could go only a short way, but others walked longer distances with Jesus.

On this day, Jesus turned to the large crowd following him. "If you want to follow me," he said, "you must give up everything. You must follow my example."

Perhaps Jesus wasn't sure the people in that large crowd understood what he was saying, so he told them two stories, two parables.

"If you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first think about what you would need and how much it would cost? If you didn't, you might start to build the tower and then run out of materials or of money. Then, your neighbors would laugh at you because you hadn't planned and now you couldn't finish the tower."

After a moment for the people to think about that story, Jesus said, "Or what king would go out to fight without thinking whether his army was large enough to defeat the enemy's army? If the king didn't think he would win, wouldn't he send one of his trusted people to take terms of peace to the enemy? And you," Jesus said as he looked at the great crowd around him, "have you really thought about what it means to be my follower?"



Disciples in Development



Jesus expects much from his disciples. But Jesus also helps us so we can be faithful followers. How do we receive help from Jesus? Over many centuries, Christians have found that some practices (things we do over and over) help us grow into more faithful disciples. Read the lists below. Check the boxes of the things you already do or have tried. Draw a star next to something you want to try this week.



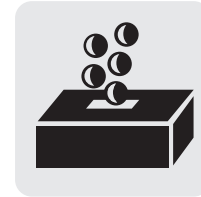
DAILY PRAYER

- Pray at a regular time each day:
 - Morning
 - Midday
 - Evening
 - Other: _____
- Offer prayers in the “ACTS” pattern:
 - A**dore (praise) God.
 - C**onfess your sins and ask God’s forgiveness.
 - T**hank God for the good in your day and life.
 - M**ake **S**upplications (requests) to God for others and for yourself.
- Pray a breath prayer. It can help you calm yourself when you are anxious. Find a short sentence about God in the Bible, or use Psalm 121:2: “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Say the first part as you breathe in, and the second part as you breathe out. Repeat this until you are calm, ready to do what is next, or to pray to God in your own words.



DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

- Read from the Bible at a regular time each day, by yourself or with a family member:
 - Morning
 - Midday
 - Evening
 - Other: _____
- Read three or four verses from the Bible at a time. Read them two or three times, slowly. Spend time thinking about the verses, groups of words, and images they bring to mind.
- Copy Bible verses special to you in a notebook. Write your thoughts about them. Include questions or prayers that came to you. Draw pictures in your notebook or add information from newspapers or magazines that remind you of these verses.



DISCIPLINES OF GIVING

- Set aside some time each week to help other people at home or through your church or a community organization.
- Set aside some of your allowance each week to give to the church.

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Tweens
Grades 5–6



2016–2017

Semicontinuous
Jer. 18:1–11
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18
Complementary
Deut. 30:15–20
Ps. 1
Phlm 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

Counting the Cost

Goal for the Session *Tweens will count the cost of following Jesus and identify what might help them mature as disciples.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–33

YOU WILL NEED

- green cloth
- Christ candle, matches or lighter
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens or pencils
- Color Pack 1
- salted crackers
- video camera (optional)

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2; pencils; *Singing the Feast, 2016–2017*; CD player
- option 2: Internet-connected device
- option 3: Color Pack 2, poster board, newspapers, magazines, glue sticks, scissors, markers

A Christ candle is a tall white candle with a cross or other Christian symbol on it. It is a reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, promises to be present when Christians gather. You can make a Christ candle by drawing a cross on a wax or battery-powered candle.

Focus on Your Teaching

Many tweens embrace causes bigger than themselves to which they can dedicate time and energy, and through which they can make a difference. Kenda Creasy Dean concludes youth may not be “the religious relativists we make them out to be,” but instead are rejecting the bland, inconsequential “Christianity” they see many adults practicing.¹ In today’s text, Jesus challenges his followers with discipleship’s demands. Resist temptation to “protect” tweens from Jesus’ radical call for loyalty—they may surprise and inspire you with their desire to respond.

Lord Jesus, open my heart to your summons and guide me to faithfully follow you. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using option 2 in Responding, plan to view www.persecution.org with learners or visit the site beforehand and print several stories for tweens to read.

Before tweens arrive, place a Bible and Christ candle on a green cloth in the center of your meeting space.

Welcome tweens by name. Gather in a circle around the candle and ask a volunteer to light it as a sign of Jesus’ presence in your midst. Pray aloud:

Loving God, send your Spirit to help us learn from your Word today. Open our hearts to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Extinguish the candle, if necessary.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Planning) and pencils. Form pairs to work together to fill in the blanks in the “Cookies” section. After a few moments, compare learners’ responses with the correct recipe in the sidebar on page 3. Invite their comments about the results.

Discuss:

- ✂ Would the recipe you and your partner planned have resulted in good cookies? Why or why not? What could you have done to improve your plan?
- ✂ When has careful planning made a difference in something you did? When has a lack of planning made a difference? (Be ready to tell of your own experiences as a way of encouraging discussion.)

Tell the group to listen to today’s Bible story for what Jesus says about planning.

1. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 193.



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

Counting the Cost

Correct recipe:

1 cup butter
 ¾ cup white sugar
 ¾ cup brown sugar
 2 eggs
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 2½ cups flour
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 ½ teaspoon salt
 2 cups chocolate chips

EXPLORING

Ask learners to offer definitions of the word *disciple*. Affirm thoughtful responses. Display Color Pack 1 and invite comments about how these pictures might help them describe what a disciple is. (For example, disciples are students, learners, apprentices, “in training.”)

Discuss:

- ✧ In what ways are the disciples in these pictures like Jesus’ disciples? In what ways are they different from Jesus’ disciples?

Distribute Bibles and have learners turn to Luke 14:25. Ask one volunteer to read aloud Luke 14:25–27 and another volunteer to read aloud verse 33. Discuss:

- ✧ What demands does Jesus make of people who want to be his disciples? What do you think about these demands?
- ✧ Verse 25 says that Jesus spoke these words to “large crowds.” Why do you think Jesus said the words in verses 26–27 to the crowds? (Perhaps Jesus wanted them to make an informed decision about following him.)
- ✧ Read Matthew 10:37. How does this verse help you understand Jesus’ words in Luke 14:26? (Perhaps that Jesus tells his disciples to love him even more than they do their families.)

Explain that at the time of Jesus, the cross was not a religious symbol. In the ancient Roman Empire, the cross was an instrument of torture used to execute criminals. In light of this, wonder together about the meaning of Jesus’ words in verse 27. (Perhaps Jesus is saying that disciples should be prepared to face a death like Jesus’ death when their beliefs and values conflict with those of worldly authorities.)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Acts 2:44–45 and Acts 4:34–35. Invite comments about how early Christians treated their possessions. Discuss:

- ✧ How does this compare with what Jesus teaches in Luke 14:33?

Form two groups. Ask one group to dramatize Luke 14:28–30 and the other group to dramatize Luke 14:31–32. Allow groups about three minutes to prepare. After both dramas are presented, ask:

- ✧ What do these two images—someone building a tower and a king planning an attack—tell you about being Jesus’ disciples?
- ✧ What images might Jesus use today to communicate this teaching about what it means to be his disciple?

Ask learners to look at the “Changes” section on Resource Sheet 1 (Planning). Take a few quiet moments for tweens to write their responses. Afterward, invite their comments about how a person might prepare himself or herself to face such changes.

Option: Make a video recording of the skits. Show them to others in the congregation and/or post them on your congregation’s Web site. Tell learners their presentations will help others consider what it means to count the cost of following Jesus.

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Disciples in Development** Invite tweens to reflect on ways to foster their own growth as disciples. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Disciples in Development) and pencils. Play meditative music, such as “Music Over Water” (track 17 on *Singing the Feast*, 2016–2017) as learners read about the disciplines and mark them as directed on the sheet. Afterward, encourage each learner to tell about one discipline he or she will commit to trying. You may want to tell tweens how you have grown spiritually by practicing one of these disciplines.
- 2. Pray for the Persecuted** To increase learners’ awareness of Christians who pay a great cost for discipleship, visit www.persecution.org or the Web site of another organization that supports persecuted Christians. Have learners read and summarize several stories about Christians paying a price for following Jesus. (Option: Select and print stories in advance if concerned about time limitations or learners directly accessing the site.) Discuss together: How do these Christians demonstrate the meaning of the “cost of discipleship”? What can we do to encourage and support these individuals? Close the activity with a time of prayer, inviting volunteers to offer prayers for the individuals they have read about.
- 3. Centered on the Cross** To help learners visualize the demands of discipleship, have them make a montage. Have learners look in newspapers and magazines for photos or headlines that illustrate things that might tempt today’s disciples away from living in the ways of Jesus. (For example, a possession, relationship, goal, or wish.) Use a glue stick to affix Color Pack 2 in the center of a piece of poster board. Have learners arrange their images around the outside of the poster, gluing them in place. Add a few images of your own. Discuss: How can we keep our lives centered on the cross—on the ways of Jesus? How does loving Jesus affect the way we value other things and people? As a group, choose a verse from Luke 14:25–33 to write on the poster. Display this montage in your meeting space as a reminder of what it means to grow in faith and mature as disciples.

CLOSING

Gather the group around the candle and light it. Read aloud the verses that immediately follow today’s reading: “[Jesus said,] ‘Salt is good. But if salt loses its flavor, how will it become salty again? It has no value . . . Whoever has ears to hear should pay attention’” (Luke 14:34–35, CEB). Offer a salted cracker to learners, being mindful of food allergies. Challenge learners, as Jesus’ disciples, to tell specific ways they will, like salt, “add flavor” to their world this week.

Invite learners to join you in this closing charge, based on 1 Timothy 4:12:

Teacher: *And now, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”*

All: *With God’s help, we will! Amen!*

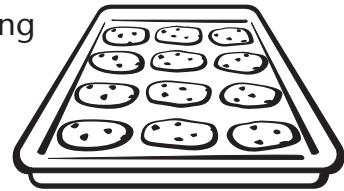
Planning

Cookies

You and your friend want to bake four dozen chocolate chip cookies for a party. Before you go to the store to buy ingredients, plan what you need. Fill in the blanks with your best estimates:



- ___ cup(s) butter
- ___ cup(s) white sugar
- ___ cup(s) packed brown sugar
- ___ egg(s)
- ___ teaspoon(s) vanilla flavoring
- ___ cup(s) all-purpose flour
- ___ teaspoon(s) baking soda
- ___ teaspoon(s) salt
- ___ cup(s) chocolate chips



Changes

When you choose to be a faithful follower of Jesus, what might change? For each of the following aspects of your life, write how things might change as you grow in faith.

With your family

With your best friends

At your school

In your neighborhood

How you spend money

How you spend free time

Disciples in Development



Jesus demands much from his disciples. The good news is that Jesus also gives much, so his followers can meet the demands. There are many ways to receive what Jesus has to offer. Over the centuries, Christians have found that disciplines (or practices) like the ones listed here help them mature as Jesus' followers. Check the practices you have tried. Put a star by practices you want to try.



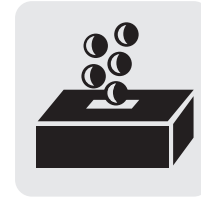
DAILY PRAYER

- Pray at a regular time each day:
 - morning
 - midday
 - evening
 - other: _____
- Offer prayers in the "ACTS" pattern:
 - A**dore (praise) God.
 - C**onfess your sins and ask God's forgiveness.
 - T**hank God for the good in your day and life.
 - M**ake **S**upplications (requests) to God, not only for yourself but also for other people.
- Pray a breath prayer: Choose a short, meaningful phrase or sentence, perhaps from Scripture. Say the first part to yourself as you inhale and the second part as you exhale. For example, Psalm 121:2: "My help comes from the LORD," as you inhale; "who made heaven and earth" as you exhale.



DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

- Read from the Bible at a regular time each day:
 - morning
 - midday
 - evening
 - other: _____
- Read three or four verses from the Bible at a time. Read them several times, slowly, and spend time thinking about the words, phrases, and images that attract your attention.
- In a journal, copy Bible verses that are important to you and jot down your reactions to them, including questions and prayers sparked by them. Illustrate your journal with pictures from newspapers and magazines or your own drawings that remind you of these Bible verses.



DISCIPLINES OF GIVING

- Plan a set amount of time each week for serving others through your church or a community organization. What you do: _____

- How much time you spend: _____

- Every time you receive money—from an allowance or a gift or from doing odd jobs—give some to help others through your church and/or a community charity.
- For a set amount of time, give up something you would normally buy for yourself and give the money you save to help others through your church and/or community charity.
- For your next birthday or an upcoming holiday, ask people to make charitable donations instead of buying gifts for you.

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Youth



2016–2017

Semicontinuous
Jer. 18:1–11
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18
Complementary
Deut. 30:15–20
Ps. 1
Phlm 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

Counting the Cost

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will be challenged to count the cost of following Jesus: taking up the cross and making everything else a secondary priority.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–33

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people want to have their cake and eat it too. They search for trusted mentors who will call them to take on meaningful mission; yet they also enjoy the benefits of living in a wealthy, privileged culture. When offered an either-or choice, many young people would select their comfortable lifestyles. Committing to the way of Jesus includes making our lives, relationships, and possessions secondary. Today's lesson posits this stark choice for young people to consider.

Holy God, help me to embrace the truth that, first and foremost, I am called to follow Jesus on his path to the cross as faithfully as I can. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- large trash can
- masking tape
- 2 balls
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles
- newsprint
- markers
- Christ candle (white pillar candle)
- lighter

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
- option 2: clear adhesive paper, multicolored tissue paper, scissors, black construction paper, tape
- option 3: newsprint, marker, paper, pens, scissors, recording of contemplative music, music player

For Film Connection

- World Trade Center*, media-viewing equipment

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the participants arrive, place a trash can on one side of the meeting space. Use masking tape on the floor to create 1) a free throw line about 8 feet from the trash can and 2) a free throw line about 12 inches from the trash can.

When the participants arrive, invite the youth to play “trash can” ball. Explain that shots made from the nearer free throw line will result in great fame and fortune for the shooter. Shots made from the further free throw line will lead to fulfillment of the shooter’s sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Show them the free throw lines and invite them to line up behind either one. Give the first participant in each line a ball. They are to throw the balls into the trash can. As the game progresses, make shooting the ball more difficult for those standing behind the 8-foot free throw line. (For example, have them shoot backwards over their heads or place a tall obstacle on the line.)

Explain that normally in a game like this, teams shoot from the same line. Spend some time discussing why some people might choose the more difficult free throw line. Ask:

- ✧ What in life reminds you of the challenge associated with shooting free throws from different lines?
- ✧ For which life situations would you choose to shoot a less challenging free throw? A more challenging free throw?

Invite the participants to keep this conversation in mind as they explore a story about Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. Pray:

God of all creation, you have gathered us today to be your holy community. Challenge us with your Word today and always. Amen.

“Hating family” in this context refers to making family and other things secondary to following Christ.

EXPLORING

To set the stage for today’s focus scripture, distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Luke 14:25–33), and recruit five volunteer readers. Explain that this Scripture passage includes some harsh language from Jesus regarding the decision to follow him. Have readers 1 and 2 read their passages. Ask:

- ✂ How do you react to Jesus’ statement that if you refuse to let go of your family, you cannot be his disciple?
- ✂ Other Bible versions say: unless you “hate” your loved ones. How do these two versions help you interpret Jesus’ words? What do you think Jesus intended to convey to the disciples? To the crowd?
- ✂ Based on the readings, what do you assume a disciple’s cross to be?

Have readers 3 and 4 read their passages.

Form two groups. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and markers.

- ✂ Have one group create want ads that include a description of what is expected of disciples based on readings 3 and 4.
- ✂ Have the other group create short series of comic book panels that bring to life readings 3 and 4.

When all are finished, give the groups an opportunity to show and read their creations to the rest of the participants. Explore these questions:

- ✂ How does it feel when you don’t finish something you start?
- ✂ Why is it important to Jesus that his disciples be able to see discipleship through to the end?
- ✂ In what situations would not calculating how something will end be beneficial? How could discipleship be characterized differently than the way Jesus does in this passage?

Have the fifth reader read his or her passage. Explore these questions:

- ✂ How do you imagine the disciples looked as Jesus told them how they were to follow him?
- ✂ How might a disciple follow Jesus halfheartedly without much forethought?

Read the quote from Emilie M. Townes’s “Where?” excerpt from the sidebar.

Ask:

- ✂ What do you think it means “to live lives of complete devotion to God”? How does that life look?
- ✂ How does taking up the cross to follow Jesus affect your understanding of discipleship?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Count the Cost** Participants will practice making priorities in their lives. Give each person a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Priorities) and a pen. Have them rank their priorities

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. . . . [We] are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

**EASY
PREP**

in life. When finished, invite the participants to name their top priorities. Ask:

- ✪ Which priorities would you be able to put behind following Jesus?
- ✪ Which priorities would you identify with following Jesus?

Have participants name ways they will let go of priorities in order to follow Jesus Christ this week.

Consider lighting a candle while the participants work to create a sacred mood in the meeting space.

2. **Taking Up the Cross** Participants will create a stained glass cross for the learning area as a reminder of Jesus' call to committed discipleship. Cut out a rectangle of clear adhesive plastic. Peel off the backing and tape the plastic rectangle sticky side up to the table. Use black construction paper strips to make an outline of a cross on the sticky plastic. Rip various colors of tissue paper into small pieces. Cover the inside of the cross with the tissue paper. Once the inside of the cross shape is covered, cut around the cross outline, leaving half an inch or so of contact paper border. Attach the cross to a window in the meeting space as a reminder of taking up the cross as a sign of discipleship.
3. **Personal Reflection** This option provides youth with a time to reflect quietly on discipleship. Write this question on a posted sheet of newsprint: *What can decrease in my life so that Jesus will increase?* Give each person a sheet of paper, a pen, and a pair of scissors. Play contemplative music while the participants cut their paper into the shape of a cross and write or draw a response to the posted question on their crosses. When all are finished, give participants an opportunity to show or read their response to the rest of the group. Invite the youth to offer sentence prayers or to pray silently, seeking God's help to accomplish what they have written.

CLOSING

Set the Christ candle in the middle of the meeting space and gather the participants around it. Light the candle and explain that it reminds us of the light of Christ that cannot be put out.

Invite the youth to name one thing in their lives that they will make a secondary priority. As each item is named, encourage the group to respond, *With God's help, let it be so.*

Send the participants with this blessing:

Go into the world as followers of Jesus Christ, looking for ways to take up the cross. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

In *World Trade Center* (2006, PG-13), first responders risk their lives to save victims of the 9/11 attacks. Watch the scene "Step Forward" and discuss:

- ✪ What factors would help you decide to risk your life for others?
- ✪ How is following Jesus like volunteering to risk your life?

The clip can be found at
wingclips.com.
bit.ly/1OXTPCk

Luke 14:25–33

1

Reader 1: Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one's own life—cannot be my disciple.

2

Reader 2: Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

3

Reader 3: If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when you have laid the foundation but couldn't finish the tower, and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: "He started something he couldn't finish."

4

Reader 4: Or can you imagine a king going into battle against another king without first deciding whether it is possible with his ten thousand troops to face the twenty thousand troops of the other? And if he decides he can't, won't he send an emissary and work out a truce?

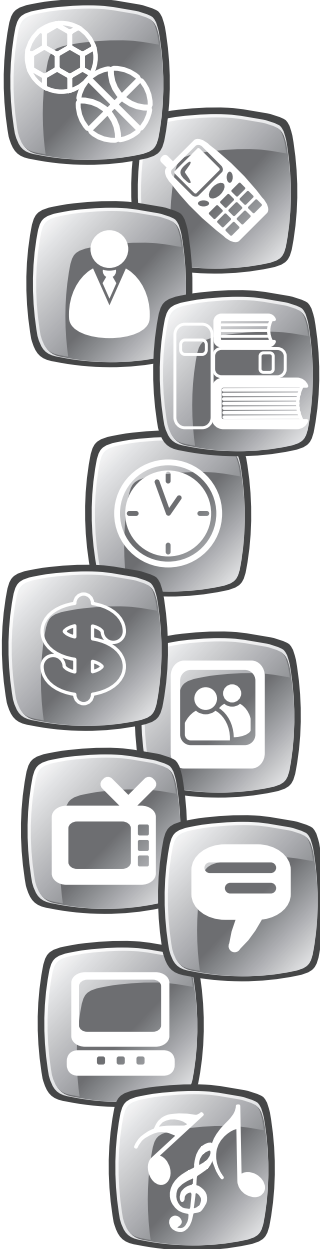
5

Reader 5: Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple.

Based on the Common English Bible.
Some scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Priorities

Directions: Number from 1 (your top priority) through 20 (your lowest priority).



- _____ Praying
- _____ Time with parents
- _____ Time with friends
- _____ Time with siblings
- _____ Participation in youth-group activities
- _____ Schoolwork
- _____ Dating
- _____ Participation in church-wide activities
- _____ Participation in sports
- _____ Serving others by volunteering
- _____ Hobbies, clubs, or extracurricular interests
- _____ Texting and social media
- _____ Listening to music
- _____ Earning money
- _____ Reading books or magazines
- _____ Playing video games
- _____ Talking on the phone
- _____ Watching TV
- _____ Watching movies
- _____ Other: _____

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING on the WORD
CURRICULUM

Young Adult
Conversations on the Feast



2016–2017

Conversations on
Luke 14:25–33

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Watch the scene “Step Forward” from *World Trade Center* (2006, PG-13; available at www.wingclips.com). Discuss how following Jesus is like volunteering to risk your life.

WHAT is important to know?

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)! (Rodney S. Sadler Jr.)

- ✠ What does it mean to carry the cross and follow Jesus? What might it not mean to carry the cross and follow Jesus?
- ✠ How do you understand these difficult words of Jesus, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (14:26)?

WHERE is God in these words?

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun. (Emilie M. Townes)

- ✠ In what sense is costly discipleship a gift of grace?
- ✠ Why is discipleship more about transformation than accumulation of information? What does this tell us about God?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life. (Charles E. Raynal)

- ✠ Why is Christian community an important part of following Jesus?
- ✠ Discipleship involves a “freedom for” love, honest facing of suffering, and faithful stewardship and a “freedom from” selfishness and sin. How might “freedom for” and “freedom from” shape our lives as disciples?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security. (Ronald P. Byars)

- ✠ How might you follow Jesus in regard to your possessions?
- ✠ What is the call to discipleship that you have heard from this text today?

God, challenge us to accept Christ’s life of costly discipleship. Amen.

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

FEASTING *on the* WORD
CURRICULUM

Adult



2016–2017

Semicontinuous
Jer. 18:1–11
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18
Complementary
Deut. 30:15–20
Ps. 1
Phlm. 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

The Cost of Discipleship

Goal for the Session

Heeding Jesus' call to discipleship, adults will evaluate their commitment to following Christ whatever the cost.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14:25–33

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- whiteboard or newsprint
- markers
- pens and paper
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- hymnals or songbooks
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 11, 2016

For Responding

- option 1: pens and paper
- option 2: pens and paper
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 and Internet-connected device

Jesus sometimes used hyperbole in teaching. He exaggerated to make a point (e.g., “hate” family members). Such exaggeration forces us to face the stark demands of Jesus’ teaching. Commitment to Christ must surpass our love for all others, no matter how dear.

Focus on Your Teaching

For many adults in today’s society, following Jesus may seem to involve few hazards. Adults know that, in some parts of the world, people die for their faith, but those instances may seem remote. Yet some adults in our society are ridiculed—even by family members and friends—for taking their faith seriously. Others keep quiet rather than offend by speaking of their faith in public. Some may never have been challenged to ask, “How deep is my commitment?” Many may welcome the chance to examine ways to renew commitment to our Lord and to consider the implications of costly discipleship.

O Christ, I thank you for your commitment to us shown in the cross. Through your Spirit, deepen my own commitment to you and to your Word. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you plan to do option 3 in Responding, preview the Web sites on contemporary martyrs (type “Christian martyrs today” into the search field) and choose a Web site that seems most relevant for your purpose.

Welcome participants warmly and introduce visitors.

Form pairs or groups of three and invite people to tell of a time when they felt that someone did not or would not appreciate their witness for Christ. Perhaps that witness was telling about their faith. Perhaps it involved speaking out about an injustice to others. Some may be unable to recall an instance, but others may have had memorable or even painful experiences. After a few minutes, gather as a whole group and have a few volunteers briefly recount their experiences.

Tell participants that today’s session deals with the possible cost of commitment to Christ.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O Lord, give us your Spirit to study, to hear your Word, and to meditate on its meaning for our lives. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

EXPLORING

Invite a volunteer to read Luke 14:25–33 aloud. Briefly discuss people’s initial reactions to the text. Some may wonder that Jesus says that we must hate family members; in that case, refer to the information in the sidebar on hyperbole.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 14:25–33). Have a volunteer read the “What?” excerpt. Invite volunteers to read the texts referenced in the excerpt (Luke 9:23; 12:33–34; and 14:27).

Write on a whiteboard or newsprint the heading “Discipleship Requirements.” Begin a list with the points in the readings—hate close relatives, carry the cross, count the cost, give up possessions, give alms, deny yourself.

Form groups of two or three and give each group a marker, pen, and paper. Have them brainstorm other requirements for discipleship found in the New Testament, and have someone write down the ideas. (If any group is stuck for ideas, point them to Luke 6:20–49; 1 Corinthians 5:6–6:20; or Galatians 5:13–26.) After a few minutes, return to the whole group and invite a member of each group to add to the list on the board the points their subgroup has found.

Invite a volunteer to read the “Where?” excerpt. Have the group discuss what might be meant by “a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings” and how this might be related to taking up our cross. Ask: Is it possible for anyone to be a “shallow or uncommitted believer”? Be sure that participants understand that our salvation is not earned by our ethical behavior or other good works, but rather that our actions are a response to Christ’s taking up his own cross on our behalf for the forgiveness of sin.

Have a volunteer read the “So What?” excerpt. Invite the group to select one of the crises mentioned in the excerpt—housing and economic crises; damage done by fossil fuels; hunger; poverty; pandemics—and discuss what cost might be involved if they were to commit themselves fully to this issue.

Lead into Responding by having a volunteer read the “Now What?” excerpt. Ask the group to name instances in which the church or individual Christians have shown willingness to risk their own security in order to do what is right.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Commitment in Daily Life** This activity gives an opportunity for adults to renew their commitment to following Christ whatever the cost.

Provide pens and paper, and ask participants to think of one new way they can show commitment to Christ in daily work, leisure, or prayer. It should be a way that will cost them something in time, effort, or finances. Have each person write a commitment promise to Christ, describing what they intend to do, and a short prayer they might pray about their promise. Encourage them to take the sheet home and use it in daily devotions and to follow through on their promise.

**EASY
PREP**

- 2. Commitment in the Congregation** This activity gives an opportunity for adults to renew their commitment to following Christ through increased involvement in congregational activities.

Have the group brainstorm the costly discipleship activities your congregation is involved in, and explain why they think these opportunities evidence costly commitment. (Members might vary on assessing the cost involved.)

Distribute pens and paper, and invite each participant to plan a way to show commitment through deepening their involvement in one of these activities. Invite them to write down details of the activity—how to contact the person in charge, dates and times of the activity, the role they believe they could take, and so on. Encourage participants to follow through on their commitment.

Saints are examples of faith. In remembering such individuals we can see how God strengthened and sustained them, and so our own faith can be strengthened.

- 3. Commitment to Prayer for Martyrs Today** In this activity adults will renew their commitment to learn about and pray for those who follow Christ in circumstances of persecution, suffering, and death. Have participants read Resource Sheet 2 (Following, Whatever the Cost) silently and then discuss what it would take to make a witness such as that of Perpetua.

Access your chosen Internet site. Have the group discuss the information provided and the value of prayer for those who suffer for the faith. While prayer may be the only thing you can do for them, it is also the most powerful way to sustain Christian brothers and sisters in critical times.

Make plans to pray regularly for those who suffer for their commitment to Christ. You might plan to meet ten minutes early for the next five sessions and to pray for those who are persecuted. Or each person may pledge to pray every day for the next month for those who suffer persecution. Make specific plans to carry out the commitment.

CLOSING

Have a few participants say how the session has affected their commitment to Christ.

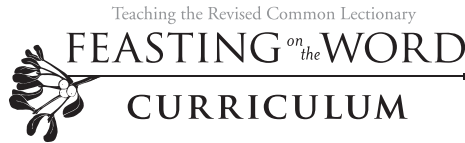
If you did not do option 3 in Responding, have a volunteer now read the story on Resource Sheet 2.

Together sing or say “Just as I Am, Without One Plea” or “Here I Am, Lord.” Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O Christ, you gave yourself for us without reservation. We would commit ourselves to you. Use us to pray and to serve you without reserve in our daily work, our congregation, our family, and wherever else we might be. In your name we pray. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 11, 2016, or e-mail it to the participants.

September 4, 2016
The Cost of Discipleship



Adult
Resource Sheet 1

Focus on Luke 14:25–33

Semicontinuous
Jer. 18:1–11
Ps. 139:1–6, 13–18
Complementary
Deut. 30:15–20
Ps. 1
Phlm. 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Jesus demands that a disciple would “carry the cross and follow” him (14:27). As such, this instruction is reminiscent of 9:23, where Jesus instructs would-be followers to “deny themselves and take up their cross daily,” then sets this in the context of losing their lives for his sake. What a harsh word this is for the contemporary Christian community, for we know where Jesus’ way leads. This is a word of obligation to a church obsessed with grace; worse, it is obligation with consequence, for those who refuse the cross are deemed unworthy of discipleship. The message is clear: discipleship costs. In fact, it will cost us everything (see also 12:33–34)!

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Emilie M. Townes

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully, or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus’ teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today’s passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers—the adjectives simply do not fit the noun.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by
Charles E. Raynal

Can the Christian community offer an interpretation of the cost of discipleship for daily life that is plausible and freeing for the people of God today? How would Calvin’s advocacy of freedom from selfishness, commitment to love, honest facing of suffering, and the faithful stewardship of creation and its gifts sound to people inside and outside the churches? The housing and economic crises; the damage to the earth by the burning of fossil fuels; and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people in all parts of the world are certainly calling us in the church to give Jesus’ call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective”
by Ronald P. Byars

It seems important to take Jesus’ exhortation with utter seriousness, recognizing that, for most of us, it poses a problem that needs to be thought through. Certainly it means at least that disciples should travel lightly, not unduly encumbered by acquiring, hoarding, or guarding one’s possessions against the other in her/his need. Certainly it must also mean that, when interests come into conflict, discipleship takes precedence over security.

Following, Whatever the Cost

Saints are people to whom we look as examples of faith. Throughout the centuries many such people have shown deep commitment to Jesus that led them to follow Christ despite the terrible cost and suffering they endured.

In the early church, many Christians suffered for their faith. Roman emperors considered themselves divine and demanded that people worship them, usually by sacrificial burning of incense, as a sign of patriotism and loyalty. Various emperors instigated persecutions of Christians who claimed allegiance to the true God and refused to worship the emperor as divine.

Perpetua

In 202 CE Roman Emperor Septimus Severus began a severe persecution of Christians in northern Africa. A catechetical group and their catechist were arrested in Carthage. The members of the group were 22-year-old noblewoman Perpetua, Felicitas and Revocatus (two slaves), Saturninus and Secundulus. Soon the group's catechist, Saturus, joined them in house arrest and baptized each of them. One of the slaves, Felicitas, was eight months pregnant. She was glad when she gave birth prematurely and the baby was adopted by a Christian family. Romans did not execute pregnant women, and Felicitas very much desired to make her public witness along with her friends.

Perpetua had an infant son, whom she nursed in prison for a time before handing him over to her family to care for. Perpetua's pagan father regularly visited her in prison and begged her to renounce her Christian faith so that she would live. But Perpetua remained firm in her commitment to Christ.

On March 7, 203 CE, at the games to honor Caesar Geta, the condemned Christians were scourged, then led to the amphitheater to face wild beasts. They carried their heads high as they marched into the arena to make a final witness for Jesus. Attempts were made to force them to dress as pagan priests and priestesses, but Perpetua resisted and was allowed to retain her tunic.

Perpetua entered the arena singing a psalm. After being tossed by a wild heifer, she rearranged her tunic and pinned up her hair so that she would look her best in this triumphant hour of witness to her Lord. Having survived the heifer attacks, Perpetua and Felicitas walked hand in hand to the spot where swordsmen waited to end their lives. The young novice gladiator assigned to Perpetua was trembling, but Perpetua guided to her throat his hand that held the sword.

