

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

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EASY  
PREP

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

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.

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 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 "World Trade Center: The Police and Fire Fighters Arrive at the Scene" ([bit.ly/WTCstep](http://bit.ly/WTCstep)) and discuss:

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

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?

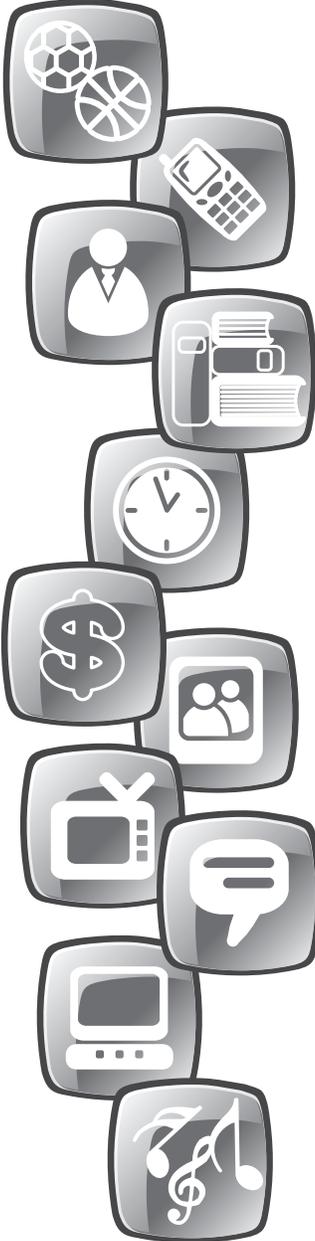
5

**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.  
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## 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: \_\_\_\_\_