

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*, 2022–2023; 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 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2022–2023*). 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.”

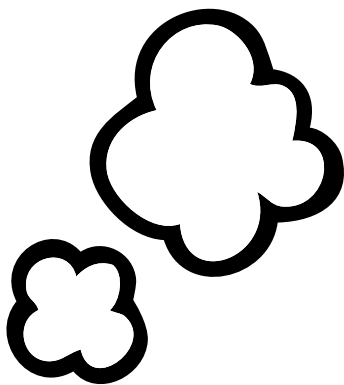
–Luke 14:25–33, CEV

September 4, 2022
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.