

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, 2022–2023*; 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 cookie 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), 193.



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

Correct cookie 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 16 on *Singing the Feast, 2022–2023*) 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!*

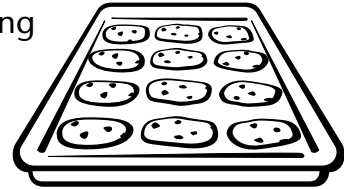
Planning

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

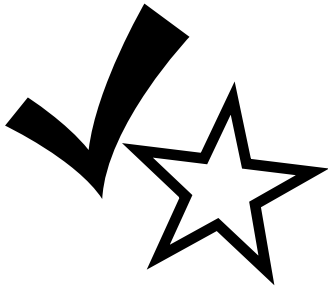
At your school

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.

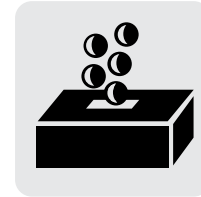


DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

- 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.