

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*, 2022–2023; 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

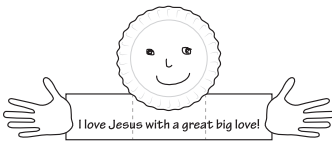
Mark the activities you will use:

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

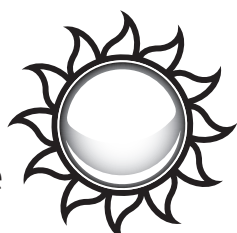
Jesus' Love for Me

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!

