

The cost of discipleship

Luke 14:25-35

Bible story summary

Jesus told the crowds that his disciples must love Jesus foremost, carry the cross and give up their possessions. Just as a tower builder and warring king plan ahead to ensure that their goal will be achieved, so also Jesus' followers must count the cost of discipleship. Salt is worth nothing if it loses its flavor.

Opening prayer for the teacher

God, we welcome you into our hearts and home. Amen.

Tips for this week

Youth can distinguish between those who only give Jesus (or religion) lip service, and those whose lives fully demonstrate a commitment to Christ. They are quick to recognize hypocrisy and also self-aware enough to know which category describes them. Chap Clark's definition of the worlds above and beneath outlines a culture where youth's survival mechanism causes them to please adults in the world above, but portray a different persona among their peers in the world beneath (Hurt: *Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, Baker Book House, 2004). Today's session confronts this issue head on. What is the cost of discipleship? Are youth willing to take faith seriously and let it affect not only their church lives, but their everyday life?

To do

- Post labeled brown paper in a cross shape on the wall (Sharing the Bible story)
- Prepare samples of salty and unsalted foods, and number them (Sharing the Bible story #3)
- Collect sheets of paper and pens (Sharing the Bible story #3)
- Choose a familiar song of commitment (Sharing the Bible story #4)

Faith focus

Be serious about following Jesus.

Bible insight Luke 16

By Mary H. Schertz

Luke 16 is difficult

Luke 16 is one of the more difficult chapters in the Bible. It begins with the parable of the dishonest steward that seems to defy all attempts to nail it down. Second, how does it all fit together? After that parable, we have some disparate sayings and then it ends with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. In the first parable, the steward is commended for his dishonesty, but in verses 10-13 Jesus says anyone who is dishonest in small ways will be dishonest in ways that really matter. That seems contradictory. Then, Jesus goes on in verses 14-18 to say that the law and the prophets were valid up until the time of John. In the very next breath, however, he says that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void—another contradiction. Finally, in the middle of that riddle, Jesus remarks that everyone enters the Kingdom of God, which somehow suspends or transcends the law, must enter violently. What does that mean? Our heads are spinning. The chapter ends, thankfully, with the parable about Lazarus and the rich man. It is a graphic and uncomfortable parable, full of unsavory details. But at least its interpretation seems straightforward.

Interpretive keys

Our job, as teachers of the Bible in the church, is not only to serve well the people of God but also to serve well the biblical text. In order to give this difficult chapter a fair hearing, we must look for some interpretive keys. We notice, first, that the two parables have something in common. They both "turn on" the concept of relationship, human relationship. Then we notice that the difficult sayings in between the two parables also "turn on" relationships—humans relationship with the divine.

The steward and the rich man

There are many ways to interpret this parable of the steward.* What is most important

to remember, however, is that a parable as a whole reveals some aspect of the kingdom of God, not just a single element within the parable. The master who commends the steward is not God even though that is what we have often understood. In addition, this is a "how much more" parable. The steward, hoist on his own petard, so to speak, nevertheless finds a creative way to salvage something for his master and retain the good will of the master's debtors not only for himself but also for the master. What this parable tells us about the kingdom of God is that if even a dishonest steward can find an honorable way to save a situation, how much more should the servants of God in the kingdom of God find creative, relational ways to redeem situations for their master, the Lord of the universe. Parabolically speaking, the steward fares far better than the rich man. In one of the most stark of Jesus' parables, the problem of the rich man is that he neither really sees nor cares for the poor man at his very gate. He is, in fact, the very antithesis not only of the crafty steward but also of the one who would enter the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is relationship

As difficult as the chapter is, it does have a cohesive point and those sayings in the middle of it are what really holds it together. The steward who, when forced to confront his own duplicity, puts relationships first and the rich man who steadfastly refuses to relate to Lazarus as a fellow human being both illustrate kingdom priorities. True kingdom riches are serving the one God with one heart. Relating to God is how we relate to other people—and vice versa. True kingdom riches are following the law not for the sake of being known as a follower of the law but rather for the sake of the one God's heart for justice. This service requires an undivided heart and it also requires a willingness to suffer violence-

Gathering

1. Welcome everyone to a new quarter, where you will explore the theme “Sharing the Message of Jesus: Stories from Luke and Acts.” If you are a new leader, introduce yourself. Offer this prayer: “God, we invite you into our midst as we gather. Reveal your love to us through Jesus. Teach us what it means to have faith and live in your way. Amen.”

2. As a prelude to today’s scripture focus, ask youth to think of something they have accomplished. This could be earning a role in a musical production, making a sports team, saving enough money to purchase something, or getting a job. Invite each person to share about their accomplishment with the group and share about your own as well. Then ask them what they had to give up for their achievement. What were the costs? Was it worth it?

3. Lead the group in reading the Bible memory passage from Luke 22:27:

“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” Luke 22:27.

Faith focus

Be serious about following Jesus.

Sharing the Bible Story

Although today begins a new quarter, the Bible stories continue to progress through the book of Luke. Today’s passage picks up where we left off last week in Luke 14. Jesus travels with the large crowds of people who flock to hear his unusual message and hope to see a miracle performed. But this time he gets to the heart of the matter. He tells the hoards of “followers” what is really required to take up the cross and be his true follower.

Ahead of time, write the following phrases on six sheets of brown paper: Love Jesus more, Carry the cross, Estimate the cost, Consider if you’re able, Give up possessions, Keep your saltiness. Post these on the wall in the shape of a cross. (Supplies: Brown paper with key phrases; reusable putty adhesive)

Ask for up to six volunteers to read today’s scripture. Each reader should read one of the following passages: Luke 14:25-26, 27, 28-30, 31-32, 33 and 34-35. After each person reads a passage, he/she will remove that piece of cross from the wall. All youth should follow along in their individual Bibles.

Jesus addressed large crowds of people with his message in Luke 14:25-35. He knew that within this mass of people, few truly realized what it took to be his disciple. Ask the youth to give examples of crowds that youth are sometimes a part of. These may include social cliques, fads, and fans of singers or sports teams. Then invite the youth to form groups of 3-5 and create a cheer for one of these examples. The cheer could be just verbal, or it could include body motions such as a human pyramid. After groups have taken time to prepare their cheer, each will perform for the others. (Bodily-Kinesthetic; Musical-Rhythmic)

Explain that we feel many pressures from crowds, peers, parents, and ourselves. Sometimes we respond to all this by putting on different personas: we act one way in a crowd, another with our best friends, another in front of our parents, and still another when we’re alone. But Jesus wants honesty, consistency and commitment. Jesus does not want us to blindly follow him or act like Christians only when we’re at church. Jesus is up front with us. He tells us what it takes to be his disciple.

Invite each person to silently reflect as you ask these questions: What separates you from the crowd? What does Jesus ask of you, in order to be his disciple?

Invite the youth to think about their level of commitment to Jesus, as you lead a song of commitment such as “I Surrender” or “Som’landela,” track xx on the Gather ‘Round CD.

Optional supplies: Gather ‘Round CD, CD player

track #

More ideas on page 3.

Jesus' disciples stand out in a crowd just like salt boldly flavors bland food. In Luke 14:34-35, Jesus reminds his followers not to lose their saltiness. Invite the youth to taste the foods you have prepared in the salt taste test. For each item, youth will write "salty" or "unsalty" on their sheet of paper. Afterwards, reveal the ingredients so you can check the accuracy of their taste. Lead the group in naming actions and attitudes that make Jesus' disciples distinct, like salt.

Supplies: foods with and without salt, paper, pens

Teaching tip

Interpreting scripture in community may seem like a risky endeavor with Youth. But it is important for to wrestle with this challenging passage that cannot simply be taken at face value. They should not get the impression that adults have all the answers to their questions about the Bible. This exercise is another step towards recognizing that faith takes thought, biblical study and prayer.

Arrange the youth into small groups, with one piece of the cross (or more than one, for a smaller class) per group. Instruct each group to reread the verse(s) associated with their phrase from Luke 14. What do they think Jesus really means by that statement? What is Jesus asking his followers to do? (Verbal-Linguistic; Interpersonal)

After small groups have discussed their passage, ask them to choose one person who will report back to the whole group. As each person shares their small group analysis, they should repost their cross piece on the wall. Allow everyone to respond to each passage and share their own questions and insights. Add your interpretation as needed, drawing from the Bible insight essay.

Other ideas

- Show a video clip or invite someone from the congregation to share about making a difficult choice to follow Jesus. Youth may discuss what that person gave up to be Christ's disciple, and how they would respond in a similar situation.
- Provide interlocking building blocks so youth can begin building a tower and think of ways they have already started building a foundation on Jesus. As they build, they can name things that interrupt this spiritual building process, and what it might mean for them to keep building and follow Jesus in the future.
- As youth discuss obstacles to their faith, match each person with a partner with whom they would feel comfortable sharing. Each person will share one tough thing they will face in the upcoming week or month, and partners will pray for one another.

Sending

1. Take down and cut apart the cross from wall, giving one piece to each youth. Invite them to keep this as a reminder of Jesus' desire for us to be serious about our faith. (Supplies: scissors)

2. Challenge the youth with James 2:26 as they depart:

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

Faith focus

Be serious about following Jesus.

WORD COUNT

introduction, max: 250

sample: 252 words (including subheads, excluding title and scripture passage)

Bible insight, max: 670

sample: 675 (includes subheads)

Gathering, max: 330

sample: 190

Sharing the Bible story, max: 900

sample: 876

Sending, max: 330

sample: 64

Type is 10 point Century Old Style regular on 13 points leading. Bible insight, activities, Other ideas are 9 on 11 Myriad.

Lines of type are longer than PC (margins are narrower).