

Gen. 17:1–7, 15–16

Ps. 22:23–31

Rom. 4:13–25

Mark 8:31–38

Take Up the Cross

**Goal for
the Session**

*Tweens will express their understanding of what it means to
“take up their cross” in their daily lives.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 8:31–38

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Jouette M. Bassler

A climactic moment in Mark’s Gospel occurs when Peter acknowledges Jesus’ true status: “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). This reading presents the ensuing conversation, which clarifies what Jesus’ messiahship entails. The pattern of this passage—Jesus’ prediction of his suffering, misunderstanding and resistance by his disciples, teachings on the nature of discipleship—appears twice more in the Gospel (9:30–37; 10:32–45). But by the end of this section the disciples seem no closer to comprehension and acceptance than they were at the beginning.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Joseph D. Small

It is easy for us to skip over Peter’s shock and revulsion at the prospect of a suffering messiah; we know the end of the story. This hinge in Mark’s Gospel points us to Martin Luther’s contrast between what he called the “theology of glory” and the “theology of the cross.” The theology of glory is built on assumptions about the way a god is expected to act in the world. The theology of the cross, however, is grounded in God’s self-revelation in the weakness of suffering and death. The theology of glory confirms what people want in a god; the theology of the cross contradicts everything that people imagine that God should be.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Paul C. Shupe

Mark has put this teaching moment of Jesus with his *disciples* at the center of his Gospel. Doing so, he reminds us that the first call Jesus made to others was not to be apostles or to be ordained or even to be members in the church, but simply to be his disciples, taking responsibility for going on their own journeys of faith with the living God. During Lent we are wise to ponder the picture of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, calling all his disciples to take up our own crosses and to walk with him in paths of love and service.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” W. Hulitt Gloer

This is a word for *everyone* who would be Jesus’ disciple then and now. We must “deny” self; so long as the tyranny of self exists, we will never “take up” the cross. We will forever be seeking painless shortcuts to the kingdom. All our efforts to make another way are a denial of the one who showed us the way, the way of the cross. When we are finally willing to accept Jesus for who he is, the suffering one who lays down his life for others, then we can understand who we are to be, and we can take up the cross and follow him.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 8:31–38

Focus on Your Teaching

Contrary to some “conventional wisdom” about tweens, most do understand the concept of making sacrifices. The issue is often whether they have found causes, beliefs, and people worth making sacrifices for. In her book about youth ministry, *Almost Christian* (Oxford University Press, 2010), Kenda Creasy Dean urges the church to introduce adolescents to the real Jesus, rather than some feel-good substitute. This session gives you the chance to do just that. Let tweens know that Jesus calls them to yield to his authority—to “deny” themselves as they follow. Their willingness to answer that call may help renew your own.

*Dear Jesus, guide me to show these tweens the joy of finding life in you.
Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ purple cloth
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ purple ribbon from February 18
- ☐ colored pencils
- ☐ Color Pack 27, 34
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ fine-tipped permanent markers
- ☐ 20" piece of wide blue ribbon

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, colored pencils; recording of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (optional)
- ☐ option 2: Internet-connected device
- ☐ option 3: your church’s order of worship

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Greet tweens as they arrive, asking about the highs and lows of the past week. Ask them to help you arrange the purple cloth, candle, and Color Pack 27 in the center of your meeting space.

Gather the group and light the candle. Take a quiet moment for group members to silently consider an answer to the question printed on Color Pack 27.

Offer this prayer:

Lord Jesus, teach us today what it means to call you Messiah, not only with our lips, but also with our lives. Amen.

Tell about a time when you were helped or served by someone when you weren’t expecting it. Invite tweens to tell their own stories. Encourage them to listen for what Jesus says about serving in the Bible reading. Extinguish the candle.

EXPLORING

Drape the wide purple ribbon from the February 18 Closing across the purple cloth. Ask learners who were present last week to recall some key insights from the story of Noah. Comment that Noah’s story reassures us of God’s faithfulness to us. Today’s story challenges us to focus on our faithfulness to God.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Messiah) and colored pencils. Read aloud the introductory paragraph. Form pairs to read the Scripture passages listed and draw lines to what each text says about the Messiah. (Answers: 1b; 2d; 3a; 4c.) Invite tweens to color in the word *messiah* as the group discusses:

✠ What expectations might these Scriptures have raised for God’s Messiah?

The Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that some Jews in ancient times were awaiting two Messiahs—one a king, the other a priest.

Ask tweens to find Mark 8 in their Bibles, assisting one another as needed. To better understand today's Gospel reading, start your study a few verses earlier. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 8:27–30. Ask:

- ✠ Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples what people were saying about him?
- ✠ Why might some people have thought Jesus was John the Baptist or Elijah or some other prophet?
- ✠ How does Peter answer Jesus' question in verse 29?
- ✠ In verse 30, what does Jesus tell the disciples to do? Why do you think Jesus says this?

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Mark 8:31–33. After the reading, ask:

- ✠ Jesus' use of the word "must" indicates the Son of Man's suffering, death, and resurrection are God's will. How might someone with the expectations for the Messiah described on the resource sheet react to Jesus' words here?
- ✠ These verses mark the first of three times in Mark that Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection (also 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Why do you think Jesus repeated this teaching so many times?
- ✠ In verse 32, why do you think Peter starts to rebuke (reprimand, criticize, censure) Jesus?
- ✠ How do you understand Jesus' response to Peter in verse 33?
- ✠ How do you imagine Peter reacted to Jesus' rebuke?

Ask another volunteer to read aloud Mark 8:34–38. After the reading, ask:

- ✠ In the first century, the cross was used for crucifixion, a cruel way the Roman Empire put its enemies to death. Knowing this, how do you think Jesus' disciples reacted to his call to "take up their cross" (v. 34)?
- ✠ How is Jesus calling followers to rethink their priorities?
- ✠ What does being "ashamed of me and of my words" (v. 38) look like in daily living? What does it look like to lose one's life "for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel" (v. 35)?

Offer this quote: "Potential followers must be ready and willing to suffer as Jesus will suffer, losing their lives in order to gain them" (excerpted from Jouette M. Bassler, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 71). Ask:

- ✠ What do you think it means to "be ready and willing to suffer"? Why does Jesus call for this?
- ✠ What do Jesus' words teach about how his followers should react to other people's suffering?
- ✠ People sometimes refer to any suffering they can't avoid as "my cross to bear." Do you think this is what Jesus means? Why or why not?
- ✠ When have you found it challenging to follow Jesus' ways? What did you do in this situation? What did you learn?

**EASY
PREP**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was executed for participating in a 1944 plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937), Bonhoeffer wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

During Lent you will add a ribbon to the worship space each week, creating a rainbow by Easter. Keep the wide ribbons to use in upcoming weeks.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Following Jesus** Many hymns have been written about what it means to follow Jesus, and these may encourage tweens to reflect on this topic in new ways. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (When I Survey the Wondrous Cross). Sing and/or listen to a recording of this hymn by Isaac Watts. Encourage learners to reflect on what they may be called to give up or to risk giving up in order to take up their crosses and follow Jesus. Invite them to write or sketch four ways they might respond to Jesus' call, one on each arm of the cross on the resource sheet. They need not share their responses.
- 2. The Persecuted Church** Around the world, many Christians suffer for their commitment to following Jesus. Read the stories of some of these people at Web sites such as www.persecution.com and www.opendoorsus.org. You might also search for advocacy efforts or ways to support those who are persecuted through your denomination. As a group, plan how you might offer support, perhaps through the advocacy of letter writing or making a bulletin-board display to tell about persecution in our day, and certainly through prayer.
- 3. When Jesus Calls** As a group, investigate how worship encourages today's disciples in their calling to follow Jesus. Looking at your church's order of worship, identify those parts of the service that encourage personal response to Jesus. What parts encourage the response of the faith community as a whole? Discuss the words and music that are used to do these things. Discuss: What, if anything, would you change in our worship so that our role as disciples was emphasized more? As appropriate, give notes from your discussion to worship planners in your church.

CLOSING

Gather around the candle and light it. Invite tweens to quiet themselves as the group sings "Dona Nobis Pacem" (Color Pack 34; track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Drape a 20" piece of wide blue ribbon over the cloth. Ask:

✠ What word, phrase, or image from today's story will you remember, and why?

Provide fine-tipped permanent markers for tweens to write or doodle their responses on the ribbon. Then offer this prayer:

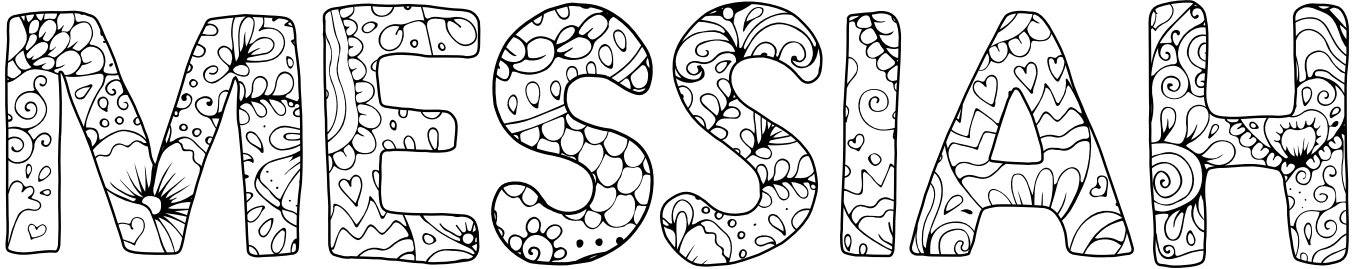
Demanding God, thank you for calling us to follow Jesus and for sending your Spirit to sustain and strengthen us on the way. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we travel through Lent and through life. Amen.

Speak this blessing to each tween:

(Name), God bless you as you go out to give yourself in love for Jesus, even as he gave himself in love for you.

Extinguish the candle. Thank tweens for coming and let them know you will pray for them in the coming week.

Messiah

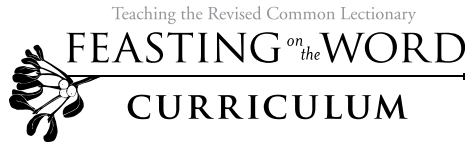


Great Expectations

In Jesus' time, many Jews believed that God would send a Messiah, a savior who would rescue Israel from its enemies. *Messiah* is a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one"; translated into Greek, it is "Christ." The Hebrew Bible helped to shape expectations about who the Messiah would be and what the Messiah would do. Read each passage below and draw a line to what it says about God's promised savior.

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|--------------------|--|
| 1. Psalm 2:5–9 | a. God's promised one will bring good news of God's mercy and love. |
| 2. Psalm 132:11–12 | b. God's promised one will defeat the nations of the world. |
| 3. Isaiah 61:1–3 | c. God's promised one will be "one like a human being"—literally, "like a son of man." |
| 4. Daniel 7:13–14 | d. God's promised one will come from the family of King David. |

February 25, 2024
Take Up the Cross



Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

