

Becoming a Disciple

Session Focus

This session on following Jesus explores the dynamics of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ: experiencing a personal call, following Jesus, and changing one's heart. "Becoming a Disciple" is explored through the stories of New Testament disciples who accepted Jesus' call to follow him. Inspired by the New Testament disciples and the example of Jesus, participants discover what it means to follow Jesus today and how they can practically live out discipleship in their lives and homes.

Learning Objectives

The session on Becoming a Disciple guides learners of all ages to . . .

- identify the dynamics of discipleship—call, following, and changing one's heart—in the stories of New Testament disciples
- discern the meaning of discipleship for their lives today and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ
- discover practical ways to follow Jesus in their daily lives

Session Overview

Part 1. (10 minutes) Gathering & Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (40 minutes) All Ages Learning: Jesus Calls People to Follow Him—New Testament Stories

Part 3. (60 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience: Following Jesus Today

- Option 1. Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format : Participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

Part 4. (20-25 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (15 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Options for In-Depth Learning

Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group

- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for this Format:

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while small group leaders move from table to table assisting.

Materials Needed

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Handouts

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts
- Bibles or New Testaments on every table or in every group.
- For family activity plan: large sheets of poster paper or newsprint, crayons, and markers for the “We Follow Jesus” poster; light-colored construction paper, glue, and scissors if you have families cut out footprints
- For the adolescent activity plan: large sheets of newsprint or poster paper, paper, colored markers, magazines (youth-oriented magazines, as well as mass market types), and creative arts materials for drawing

Sharing Learning Reflections

- Handout #8: Becoming a Disciple: Adult Activity Plan

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service
- Bible

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering (10 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities, or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

This session on following Jesus explores the dynamics of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ: experiencing a personal call from Jesus to follow him, accepting the challenge to follow Jesus, and examining how a relationship with Jesus will change our hearts and lives. We are going to explore becoming a disciple through the stories of New Testament disciples who accepted Jesus' call to follow him. Inspired by their stories and the example of Jesus, we are going to discover what it means to follow Jesus today and how we can practically live out discipleship in our lives and homes.

Present an overview and the schedule of the program.

1. Group Formation

Organize people into intergenerational small groups of approximately eight people for the All Ages Learning Experience. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

For the In Depth Learning Experience (Part 3) organize the participants into three types of table groups: family clusters of two or more families, groups of adolescents, and groups of adults. See the session plans for adolescents and adults for more instructions on organizing groups.

2. Opening Prayer Service

Preparation

Set up a prayer table with symbols of Baptism: Bible, cross or crucifix, bowl of water and small white towel, bowl of oil, white (baptismal) candle. Consider displaying icons, paintings, and/or statues of Jesus calling the disciples or Jesus with the disciples.

Gather

Come, Lord Jesus,
startle us with your presence, life-sustaining as air,
to open our hearts to praise you,
to open our minds to attend you,
to open our spirits to worship you,
to open us to live our lives
as authentically and boldly
as you lived yours.

Come, Lord Jesus,
be with us in our longing;
come, stay with us in our needing;
come, go with us in our doing;
come, struggle with us in our searching;
come, rejoice with us in our loving.
Amen.
(Ted Loder. *Guerrillas of Grace*.)

Listen

Call of the Disciples: John 1:35-42 or Mark 1:16-20

Respond

Christ Jesus, you love us so much that you seek us out and personally call us to follow you.
Response: Give us the grace to follow you.

Christ Jesus, you call us to open our lives to God's love and will.
Response: Give us the grace to follow you.

Christ Jesus, you call us to shape our lives on the pattern of your own life.
Response: Give us the grace to follow you.

Christ Jesus, you call us to love and forgive, to serve those in need,
and to proclaim your Good News.
Response: Give us the grace to follow you.

Go Forth

Gracious God, we ask you to open our hearts and minds to the call of Jesus. We want to follow him on the path of discipleship, but it is a hard journey. Give us the courage to accept Jesus' invitation and to live our lives as he lived his. Inspire us to find ways to follow Jesus every day. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Jesus Calls People to Follow Him—New Testament Stories (40 minutes)

The All Ages Learning Experience focuses on the stories of people in the New Testament whom Jesus called to follow him—getting the participants “inside the shoes” of real people who were called by Jesus. Participants will encounter Jesus through the lives of those in the New Testament who chose to follow him and then find out how their lives were changed because of their acceptance of his invitation to follow him.

There are two options for engaging people in exploring the stories. The first option is designed for the entire group; the second option uses intergenerational small groups.

Option A: “People Who Followed Jesus” Quiz Show

Materials Needed

- Handout #2
- Handout #3
- Newsprint or PowerPoint

Preparation

Organize a quiz show with New Testament disciples who followed Jesus. Select a moderator for the quiz show and ten volunteers to be disciples from the New Testament. From the list below give each “disciple” his or her selected Scripture passages to read. Ask them to prepare by using their own bibles.

- Mary Magdalene: Matthew 27:55-61 and John 20:1-18
- Matthew (Levi): Mark 2:13-17
- Nicodemus: John 3:1-21 and John 19:38-42
- Thomas: John 20:24-29
- Peter: Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 14:32-41, Mark 14:66-72, John 13:3-20, John 21:15-19, and Acts 2:14, 22-24, 32-33, 36, 37-42
- Paul: Acts 9:1-30, Acts 26:2-23, and Acts 16:16-40
- Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-9
- The Samaritan Woman: John 4:5-30, 39-42
- Stephen: Acts 6:5-15 and Acts 7:54-60
- Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52

Ask each disciple to become familiar with the Scripture passages about their New Testament person. On the Quiz Show they are going to be interviewed by the moderator, who will ask them the following questions:

- How did Jesus call you? How did you meet? Why did you meet?
- How were you “changed” when you chose to follow Jesus?
- How did you follow Jesus after you met him? How did you live your decision to follow Jesus? (If the story does not include lots of details about this, suggest ways you think that person would have followed Jesus.)
- What feelings did you have toward Jesus?

If the New Testament stories do not include all of the answers to the above questions, disciples should prepare a response in keeping with the New Testament disciple's story. Each disciple must keep his or her identity a secret because the participants are going to identify each of the people.

You may want to have gift prizes for the individuals or families who identify each disciple correctly.

Write the three concluding questions on newsprint or in a PowerPoint presentation.

The Quiz Show

The moderator guides the Quiz Show using the following process.

Begin the Quiz Show with all of the New Testament disciples "on stage." When each disciple is interviewed, they should stand. Call them New Testament Disciple #1, #2, and so forth. It is important to keep the person's identity a secret. Keep the interviews moving. Spend only about two minutes interviewing each person.

Introduce the Quiz Show, using the words below or your own words.

Welcome to the "People Who Followed Jesus" Quiz Show. We are going to hear the moving stories of ten people who met Jesus and chose to follow him. We are going to hear about how they met Jesus and how he changed their lives. But we are going to keep their identities a secret. Our studio audience will attempt to figure out the real identities of our ten New Testament disciples. So let's begin.

Interview each disciple using the following questions:

- How did Jesus call you? How did you meet? Why did you meet?
- How were you "changed" when you chose to follow Jesus?
- How did you follow Jesus after you met him? How did you live your decision to follow Jesus?
- What feelings did you have toward Jesus?

Pause after each interview to give the participants an opportunity to identify the New Testament disciple and write his or her name on Handout #2 (adolescents and adults) or Handout #3 (families with children). Families should work together to determine who the New Testament disciple is.

Reveal each New Testament disciple's identity after you have interviewed all ten persons. Ask the disciple to stand and reveal his or her name. After the last person has revealed his or her name, check with the "audience" to see how well they did. Were there one or two disciples who "stumped" the audience? Give prizes for the individuals or families who identify each disciple correctly.

Conclude the activity by inviting the table groups to discuss the following questions as a group. Each person should share an answer to the first question before the participants discuss the second and third questions.

Write these questions on newsprint or create PowerPoint slides with the questions.

- Which New Testament disciple seemed the most interesting to you? Why?
- How were people changed when they met (encountered) Jesus and chose to follow him?
- What did it mean for them to follow Jesus?

Option B: "People Who Followed Jesus" Table Game

Materials Needed

- Handout #1
- Large index cards, paper, and crayons or markers
- Newsprint or PowerPoint

Preparation

There are ten New Testament disciples included in this activity. You can use all ten passages with families, but certain Scripture passages have been recommended for families. These are shorter passages that will make it easier for children to read or for parents to read to their children. (You can also select two or three passages for Peter and include him in the family group.) Photocopy the recommended family Scripture passages on a different color so you can give them to the family tables.

- Mary Magdalene (recommend for families)
- Matthew (Levi) (recommend for families)
- Nicodemus
- Thomas (recommend for families)
- Peter (select 2-3 readings for families)
- Paul
- Zacchaeus (recommend for families)
- The Samaritan Woman
- Stephen
- Bartimaeus (recommend for families)

Write the two sets of discussion questions on newsprint or prepare a PowerPoint.

Table Game

Introduce the activity, using the words below or your own words.

Our first activity gets us "inside the shoes" of real people who were called by Jesus to follow him. We are going to encounter Jesus through the lives of ten people in the New Testament who chose to follow him and then find out how their lives were changed because of their acceptance of his invitation to follow him.

Ask each person in the intergenerational groups to select one sheet of paper with the name of a New Testament disciple and Scripture passage(s) that describe his or her relationship with Jesus. There are certain Scripture passages designated for families only. These are shorter passages that will make it easier for children to read or for parents to read to their children. Each family member should have their own New Testament disciple.

Explain that each person will read the designated Scripture passage(s) to gain information about their disciple. Distribute a large index card to each person. Explain that each person should write on the index card their answers to the questions for the person they have selected. Parents can write for children. Younger children can draw a picture of their person, illustrating the Scripture story. Provide each table with paper and crayons or markers.

Write these questions on newsprint or create PowerPoint slides with the questions.

- How did Jesus call you? How did you meet? Why did you meet?
- How were you “changed” when you chose to follow Jesus?
- How did you follow Jesus after you met him? (If the story does not include lots of details about this, suggest ways you think that person would have followed Jesus.)
- What feelings did you have toward Jesus?

Direct participants to present their New Testament disciple to their group, using their responses to the four questions or sharing their drawings. Participants should not reveal the identity of the person. Encourage people to speak in the first person, literally becoming the character. After each presentation, the group should try to determine who the New Testament disciple is.

Conclude the activity by inviting the table groups to discuss the following questions. Each person should share an answer to the first question before discussing the second and third questions.

Write these questions on newsprint or create PowerPoint slides with the questions.

- Which New Testament disciple seemed the most interesting to you? Why?
- How were people changed when they encountered Jesus and chose to follow him?
- What did it mean for them to follow Jesus?

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (60 minutes)

Families with Children Learning Experience: We Follow Jesus

Preparation

Have several Bibles or New Testaments on every table or in every group.

Materials Needed

- Handout #4 for parents
- Large sheets of paper, one per family
- Light-colored construction paper for footprints, 12 per family
- Glue, scissors
- Markers, crayons, pens

1. Introduction

Guide families through the learning activities as outlined below and on Handout #4.

Jesus calls us personally to follow him. We have experienced the stories of New Testament disciples who were called by Jesus and followed him. In this activity you will work together as a family to explore what it means to follow Jesus today by describing what a disciple believes, what a disciple feels, and how a disciple acts. For example:

- Believes: A disciple believes Jesus is the Son of God.
- Feels: A disciple experiences Jesus' love and forgiveness.
- Acts: A disciple serves people in need.

Together with your children you are going to create a "We Follow Jesus" poster with footprints of family members. In each footprint you and the children are going to write one thing a disciple believes, feels, and does (acts). Each person in your family will take off his or her shoes and socks and outline the shape of both feet on individual sheets of paper that you can cut out and glue on the poster or by outlining your feet right on the poster. Make sure that you have 12 footprints on the poster.

2. Creative Activity

Step 1. As a family develop your own ideas for what a disciple believes, feels or does (acts). Record your answers on the worksheet.

Step 2. Think of what you have learned about following Jesus from the stories of the New Testament disciples. Try to identify what they believed, what they felt, or how they acted. You might want to read several stories from the opening activity of the session. Record your answers on the worksheet.

- Mary Magdalene: Matthew 27:55-61 and John 20:1-18
- Matthew (Levi): Mark 2:13-17
- Nicodemus: John 3:1-21 and John 19:38-42
- Thomas: John 20:24-29
- Peter: Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 14:32-41, Mark 14:66-72, John 13:3-20, John 21:15-19, and Acts 2:14, 22-24, 32-33, 36, 37-42
- Paul: Acts 9:1-30, Acts 26:2-23, and Acts 16:16-40
- Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-9
- The Samaritan Woman: John 4:5-30, 39-42
- Stephen: Acts 6:5-15 and Acts 7:54-60
- Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52

Step 3. Read the following Scripture passage from the Gospel of Luke in which announces Jesus' mission. It provides insights into what was important for Jesus and those who follow him. Using this passage discuss as a family what you would add to the ideas on your worksheet.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:16-21)

Step 4. Review your list of what disciples believe, what they feel, or how they act. Is there anything missing? Discuss the following questions to see if there is anything you would add to your list. The Scripture passages are only examples. You may want to read one or two stories together as family.

- If you saw Jesus in action and heard him teach, what would you believe about Jesus? (Example: Matthew 15:13-17)
- If you were healed or forgiven by Jesus, what would you believe about him? (Example: John 9:1-7, 35-38 or John 8:1-11)
- If you were healed or forgiven by Jesus, what would you feel?
- If you saw Jesus serving people in need, what would he say to you about serving others? (Example: Matthew 25: 34-40 and John 13:12-16)
- If you heard Jesus telling people about relying on God, what would he say? (Example: Luke 1-13)

Step 5. Create your twelve footprints by selecting four things disciples believe about Jesus, four things disciples feel about Jesus, and four things that disciples do (act). Write or draw one characteristic in each footprint. (For small feet you can write the characteristic around the foot.) On the top or in the center of the poster, write, "We Follow Jesus," in large print.

Step 6. Share your "We Follow Jesus" poster with other families at your table or at nearby tables.

Take your poster home and hang it on a wall to remind everyone of how you are following Jesus.

3. Concluding Reflections

When you have finished your creative projects and shared it with the families at your table, discuss the following questions as a table group:

- What did you learn about following Jesus from this activity?
- When you think about what you wrote on your poster about following Jesus, where does your family feel affirmed and where is your family challenged to grow?
- What can your family start doing now to follow Jesus more faithfully?

Adolescent Learning Experience: Being a Disciple Today

Materials Needed

- Handout #5
- Large sheets of newsprint or poster paper
- Paper
- Colored markers
- Magazines (youth-oriented magazines, as well mass-market types) and creative arts materials for drawing

Preparation

Have several Bibles or New Testaments on every table or in every group.

Guide adolescents through the learning activities as outlined below and on Handout #5. Write the essential instructions on newsprint or create a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions.

1. Introduction

Jesus calls us personally to follow him. We have experienced the stories of New Testament disciples who were called by Jesus and followed him. In this activity you will explore what it means to follow Jesus today by creating a job description for a disciple. Use what you already know and what you are learning in this session to develop the job description.

Your job description will have three components: what a disciple believes, what a disciple feels, and how a disciple acts. For example:

- Believes: A disciple believes Jesus is the Son of God.
- Feels: A disciple experiences Jesus' love and forgiveness.
- Acts: A disciple serves people in need.

Divide your group into three teams, one for each component: believes, feels, and acts. Each group will focus on only one aspect of the job description. Use the following steps to develop your job description. Record your answers on the worksheet.

2. Develop a Job Description for a Disciple Today

Step 1. Begin by developing your own ideas, as a group, for your part of the disciple's job description believes, feels or acts. Record your answers on the worksheet.

Step 2. Think of what you have learned about following Jesus from the stories of the New Testament disciples. Try to identify what they believed, what they felt, or how they acted. Record your answers on the worksheet.

- Mary Magdalene: Matthew 27:55-61 and John 20:1-18
- Matthew (Levi): Mark 2:13-17
- Nicodemus: John 3:1-21 and John 19:38-42
- Thomas: John 20:24-29

- Peter: Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 14:32-41, Mark 14:66-72, John 13:3-20, John 21:15-19, and Acts 2:14, 22-24, 32-33, 36, 37-42
- Paul: Acts 9:1-30, Acts 26:2-23, and Acts 16:16-40
- Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-9
- The Samaritan Woman: John 4:5-30, 39-42
- Stephen: Acts 6:5-15 and Acts 7:54-60
- Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52

Step 3. Read the following Scripture passage from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus announces his mission. It provides insights into what was important for Jesus and those who follow him. Using this passage, what would you add to the ideas on your worksheet.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'*

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:16-21)

Step 4. Review your list of what disciples believe, what they feel, or how they act. Is there anything missing? Think about the following questions to see if there is anything you would add to your list. The Scripture passages are only examples.

- Believe: What did the disciples believe about Jesus? (See Matthew 15:13-17)
- Believe: What did those who were healed by Jesus believe about him? (See John 9:1-7, 35-38)
- Believe: What did those who were forgiven by Jesus believe about him? (See John 8:1-11)
- Feel: What did those who were forgiven or healed by Jesus feel?
- Feel: What were the disciples feeling after Jesus died? after Jesus appeared to them?
- Feel: What did the disciples feel during times of trouble? (See Matthew 8:23-27)
- Act: What did Jesus send the twelve apostles out to do? (See Matthew 10:1-15)
- Act: What did Jesus say about serving others? (See Matthew 25: 34-40 and John 13:12-16)
- Act: What did Jesus say about relying on God? (See Luke 1-13)

Step 5. Compile all of the results by having each team share their report. Invite other group members to add to the list. Create a newsprint sheet with three columns—Believes, Feels, Acts—and write the results from all of the group work on this one newsprint sheet.

Step 6. Using your job description for a disciple, develop a creative project that “recruits” people to follow Jesus today. Select an audience for your presentation. You can recruit an all ages audience or target families with children, teenagers, young adults, or adults. Develop a “recruitment campaign” that will get people’s attention and invite them to follow Jesus today.

Here are several ways that your group can create a presentation:

- Write your job description in the form of a song. Write an original song, such as rap song, or take a popular song and re-write it with new lyrics. Create a radio advertisement
- Create a visual advertisement to recruit people to follow Jesus. Think of the type of media that people you are targeting read or view: magazines, posters, billboards, radio, TV, web sites, and so on.
- Create a “Help Wanted” ad for the newspaper.
- Create artwork that illustrates the job description of a disciple today. Artwork can take many forms, such as drawing pictures or symbols or using magazine photos to represent what a disciple today believes and feels and how a disciple acts.

Allow time for groups to complete their job descriptions.

3. Concluding Reflections

Discuss the following questions:

- What did you emphasize in your job description?
- Would your creative project get people’s attention and invite them to follow Jesus? Why?
- What did you learn about following Jesus from this activity?
- When you think about the “job description” for a disciple today, where do you feel affirmed and where are you challenged to grow?

Adult Learning Experience: Following Jesus Today

Materials Needed

- Handout #6

Guide adults through the following process or have them work in a self-directed way.

1. Our Experiences of Being Called

Throughout our lives each of us has experiences of being called – into a new relationship, to a new job, to a new project or activity. Take a moment to reflect personally on one experience of being called.

Think of a time in your life when you experienced being called:

- What were you called to?
- What was involved?
- What did it require of you?

Share your reflections with your group. This is a storytelling experience, so give each person an opportunity to share without discussion or comment.

2. Personal Call to Follow Jesus

Read and consider the following:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

“This Gospel story of the calling of the disciples makes it clear that being a disciple of Jesus is not a career choice. It is a personal call. As in the case of the fishermen of Galilee, it can come unexpectedly into our lives and completely disrupt what we normally do. For others it can be a more gradual process, a slow awakening to the meaning of the Gospel for our lives. In every instance the call to follow Jesus is a gift of God, a ‘grace’ in the full sense of the term. It is meant to reach down into the very depths of our being and affect every aspect of our life.

“When we are called by someone we can either fall silent and turn away, or we can respond. The personal categories of call and response are important when considering the implications of Christian discipleship. Following Jesus does not entail only one aspect of our life; being a disciple touches everything about us—our values, our choices, our resources, our dreams. Therefore, we can expect changes and challenges once the call to be a disciple of Jesus has been heard and if we choose to respond to it.”

(Donald Senior, “Following Jesus: Discipleship Today”)

Think about your call to follow Jesus:

- How were you called to follow Jesus? Was it a gradual process, a slow awakening, or an unexpected, almost sudden, discovery that you were being called?

Share several reflections about being called by Jesus with your group.

3. Becoming a Disciple

Read and consider the following:

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:14-21)

Discipleship means imitating Jesus' life, especially through openness to God's will in the service of others. This gets at the heart of the matter. The intrinsic meaning of discipleship is the notion of "following"; the disciple shapes his or her life on that of the master or mentor. "Follow me"—those two words from the Gospel story distill the essence of Christian life.

"Obviously 'following' or 'imitating' Jesus does not mean simply copying the surface details of his life, such as wearing first century garb or becoming an itinerant preacher. Imitating Jesus means that Christians are to shape their own lives in the pattern of Jesus. This is no simple process nor is there only one way of expressing the pattern of Christ's life in our own. Here is where the authentic disciple becomes a true learner by constantly reflecting on the teaching and example of Jesus and by trying to see their meaning in our everyday lives.

"Jesus announced the nearness of God's reign in which the gifts of creation are not exploited but revered and shared, where human beings are treated as children of God, where oppression and injustice are expunged, where the sick are healed, where the disabled are not excluded but have full access to the community, where those pushed to the margins are drawn into the heart of the community, where enmity and violence are replaced by reconciliation and love. The Gospels illustrate that the reign of God was not some romantic utopian ideal for Jesus or beautiful words spoken without cost but rather something he embodied in his own life and mission. "What Jesus proclaims by word, he enacts in his ministry" (*Economic Pastoral #42*).

"Each of the evangelists portrays a Jesus consumed with compassion, a tireless healer who was willing to break social and religious taboos to carry out his mission. The sick and dispossessed were drawn to him like a magnet and several times the Gospels describe compelling scenes as scores of the sick stream toward Jesus seeking to be healed. Jesus was not afraid to risk his own reputation—and ultimately his own safety—in order to affirm the dignity of the marginalized and to draw them into the center of his community. He invited the hated tax collector Levi to be a disciple and welcomed the bold affection of a public sinner in Simon's house. The detested Samaritans become the heroes of his stories. He included women among his disciples in an age and culture when women had no public status. Nor did Jesus fear to meet and even praise Gentiles who were regarded as enemies of his people.

"In what he said and what he did Jesus embodied the values of God's Reign. "Following Jesus" means absorbing that same inclusive, compassionate, and just vision of the human family. It would surely be empty religious rhetoric if the ministry of Jesus were construed solely in private, personal terms. Following the will of Jesus, without fail, leads to the hard realities of social, economic, and political justice.

“Consider the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is portrayed as a prophet who challenges the community of Israel, particularly the rich and powerful, to remember their covenant with God, a covenant calling for the sharing of resources with the poor and defenseless. Like the great prophets before him, Jesus’ challenge was disturbing and met fierce, death-dealing opposition. Jesus’ death on the cross is the ultimate sign of his message: a life poured out in love for others. It is also the sign that looms ahead in every disciple’s journey: following Jesus is not without cost. The way of discipleship can become the way of the cross.” (Donald Senior, “Following Jesus: Discipleship Today”)

Reflection and Discussion

If you had to develop a “job description” for a disciple of Jesus Christ today, what would you include in this job description? Complete the sentence: “A disciple is someone who . . .”

As a group, share your reflections on discipleship today and then create a summary report that reflects what your group believes it means to be a disciple today.

4. Change of Heart

Read and consider the following:

“The compelling beauty of the reign of God and the challenge it poses for many of our values and assumptions lead to another crucial dimension of discipleship. We are told that the disciples left everything—family members, hired hands, home, boats, livelihood—and followed Jesus. Jesus himself declared, “The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). The Gospel assumes that becoming a disciple of Jesus and attempting to live by the values of God’s reign will mean changes in the way we think and act. It will mean “repentance.” The Greek term used for this in the Gospel is *metanoia*. Literally it means a “change of mind” or “change of perspective.” That is an apt description of what has to happen if the Gospel is to take root in our lives. We need to change our perspective. Not “perspective” in a superficial sense but a change in our entire view of things, looking at reality through the values and vision of human life expressed in the Gospel.” (Donald Senior, “Following Jesus: Discipleship Today”)

Reflection and Discussion

When you think about the “job description” for a disciple today, how do you feel affirmed and how are you challenged to grow, i.e., to “change your heart”?

Share several reflections about the challenges you face to grow as a disciple.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20-25 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Here are several suggestions for sharing from each age group:

- Families: Ask families to share their “We Follow Jesus” poster. Children and parents can process around the room holding their posters high so that everyone can see them.

- Adolescents: Ask several adolescent groups to share their creative projects for recruiting people to follow Jesus.
- Adults: Ask several adult groups to share their job descriptions for being a disciple today.

Ask the participants to rejoin their intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience to share their concluding reflections on the session.

Present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to understand what it means to follow Jesus today. To help us take our learning from this session into our lives and homes reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your group.”

- What is the most important “lesson” you have learned about following Jesus?
- How can you as an individual and as family follow Jesus more faithfully in the coming weeks? Think of practical things that you can start doing now.

Invite participants to take several minutes for small group sharing.

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (15 minutes)

Preparation

Set up a prayer table with symbols of Baptism: Bible, cross or crucifix, bowl of water and small white towel, bowl of oil, white (baptismal) candle. Consider displaying icons, paintings, and/or statues of Jesus calling the disciples or Jesus with the disciples.

You will need one or two people with bowls of water to bless the community with water during the prayer service.

Light the large candle to begin the prayer service.

Gather

Lord Jesus,
 at your own baptism
 the heavens were opened
 and you received the Holy Spirit
 to empower you to proclaim the Good News to the poor
 and restore sight to the blind.

Pour out that same Holy Spirit on us.
 Give us the grace to follow you faithfully
 and bring your Good News to the world.
 Amen.

Listen

Leader:

The story of Jesus' baptism is found in all four Gospels—signaling what an important event it was. Although Jesus, being sinless, has no need of repentance, and therefore no need of baptism, he acts as humanity's representative. He identifies himself with sinners. His baptism is an acceptance of the human condition. Jesus goes down into the water. When he comes up, God declares him "my beloved Son." In Baptism we, too, are claimed as sons and daughters of God.

Gospel Reading:

Baptism of Jesus: Matthew 3:13-17 or Mark 1:9-11 or Luke 3:21-22 or John 1:29-34

Respond

Leader:

In Baptism, we are immersed in water as a sign of our dying with Christ, and then rising out of the water into new life with Christ. Christ becomes our source of living water, and we are called to become "living water for a thirsty world."

Father,
you give us grace through sacramental signs,
which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power.

In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol of the grace
you give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation
your Spirit breathed on the waters,
making them the wellspring of all holiness.

The waters of the great flood
you made a sign of the waters of baptism,
which make an end of sin
and a new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea
you led Israel out of slavery,
to be an image of God's holy people,
set free from sin by baptism.

In the waters of the Jordan
your Son was baptized by John
and anointed with the Spirit.

Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side
as he hung upon the cross.

After his resurrection he told his disciples:
"Go out and teach all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Father,
look now with love upon your church,
and unseal for her the fountain of baptism.

By the power of the Holy Spirit
give to the water the grace of your Son,
so that in baptism
all those whom you have created in your likeness
may be cleansed from sin
and rise to a new birth of innocence
by water and the Holy Spirit.

We ask you, Father, with your Son
to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font.
May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism
rise also with him to newness of life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Rite of Baptism #54)

The prayer leaders now bless the community with water.

Leader:

The signing of the senses represents our commitment to give ourselves totally to Jesus and following as disciples. As I proclaim each signing, make the sign of the cross on your body, and respond: “Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.”

Receive the sign of the cross on your *forehead*. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do.
Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.
Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Final Blessing

I place you entirely under the sign of Christ's cross in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Response: Amen.

Go Forth

Jesus, you call to our hearts: "Leave anything that holds you back from deeper love. Come follow me, again and again." Grant us the courage to leave behind whatever keeps us from you and to trust you with our lives. May our heart's connection with you be so strong and true that we will daily risk the road of following in your footsteps. Keep us open to the adventure of life where we meet you day by day. Remind us often of our inner goodness. Help us to believe that you look upon us with love. Thank you for the call to be your disciple. Amen.
(Joyce Rupp. *Out of the Ordinary*)