

Followers of Jesus Christ

Series Overview

Following Christ involves a wholehearted commitment. Disciples become like the Master, learners become like the Teacher. Christianity is not simply a ticket to heaven. No self-serving version of Christianity will bring us to maturity in Christ, allowing the church to minister and serve God, others, and the world. No self-centered version of Christianity will let us enjoy the fullness of Christianity in full-faced relationship with Christ. Answering the call to follow Jesus turns our lives in a different direction. We can't follow unless we go where he leads. This series of small group discussions looks at centering our lives on Christ, weathering the storms of life, going where Jesus goes, caring for others, and focusing on God's grace.



February 8, 2009

Session One: Centering Our Lives on Jesus

Theme: *Everyone who wants to follow Jesus is called to a whole-life commitment and change.*

Texts: Luke 9:57–62; 2 Peter 1:3–11

Summary: In this study, we investigate the wholeness (integrity) of biblical Christianity. What does it mean to center our lives on Jesus? How does one go about centering all of one's life on Jesus? Obviously, the question demands that we think about who is most important to us, what our lives are all about, and how we live 24/7. Centering on Jesus defines the focal point of life, that to which we return again and again to avoid Christian eccentricity (off-centeredness). Lives centered on Jesus are obvious—people live like Jesus, look like Jesus, and think like Jesus.

Ice Breaker

Share the following exercise as a group.

- Take a moment (probably 30 seconds and no more than a minute) to let each group member do the exercise. Then discuss the results.
- Exercise: Think as quickly as you can of any person you know. Imagine that person's presence, face, features, characteristics, mannerisms. What is the center of that person's life?
- Discussion: Talk about the various 'centers' the group came up with (without identifying the people whom group members thought about).

What are some appropriate 'centers' for the Christian life?

(You may want to think of Christians you have known who have focused on different aspects of the Christian life in their walk with God.)

Bible Study

Which of these 'centers' do you think of when you think of Paul?

- His identity as 'chief of sinners' -- forgiveness
- His clean break with his past in Judaism -- newness
- His care for the churches -- love/care
- His desire to share the gospel -- evangelism

Which of these 'centers' do you think of when you think of Peter?

- His denial of Jesus -- forgiveness
- His sermon on the Day of Pentecost -- proclamation
- His confession of Jesus as the Christ -- worship
- His commitment to spiritual growth -- teaching

What was Jesus saying to the man in Luke 9:57-58?

- You don't know what you are promising to do.
- Thank you for being willing to help me.
- Going will take you away from what is comfortable.

What was Jesus saying to the man in Luke 9:59-60?

- Why do you make excuses about things that don't matter?
- Following me requires that you get your priorities right.
- The best thing you can do is proclaim the kingdom.

What was Jesus saying to the man in Luke 9:61-62?

- You can't start and stop.
- Following me requires a commitment to work and service.
- To follow me is to be part of the kingdom of God.

Which of the three do you identify with most closely? Why?

- The willing volunteer who wanted to follow.
- The one whom Jesus asked to follow.
- The one who volunteered conditionally.

What would you say were the 'centers' of the lives of the three 'followers' in the text?

- The willing volunteer who wanted to follow.
- The one whom Jesus asked to follow.
- The one who volunteered conditionally.

Discuss the progression of 2 Peter 1:5-11.

- Which item in the list is the easiest for you?
- Which item in the list is the most difficult for you?
- What are the 'near-sighted' and 'blind' in this text centered on?
- What should they be centered on?
- What 'things' does Peter say we should 'do'?

Applying

What are some of the greatest challenges you face in living out a wholehearted commitment to Christ?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think the Christians you know are focused on Christianity as a ticket to heaven?

Describe the characteristics you believe are part of maturity in Christ?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think most Christians enjoy full-faced relationship with Christ?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how different is your life now than before you became a Christian? [If you've been a Christian a while, how different do you think your life is than what it would otherwise have been?]

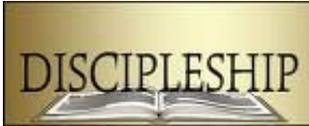
On a scale of 1-10, how willing are you to go where he leads?

Connecting

How can the members of this group help one another focus on Jesus?

How can the members of this group connect with and serve specific people not in this group? [Lovingly discuss specific people, needs, and actions if possible.]

How can we demonstrate to others that our life is focused on Jesus?



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March 8, 2009

Session Two: Learning to Weather the Storms

Theme: *God never promised that life would be easy, but he assures us that he is always in control and will always be with us.*

Texts: Psalm 23; Mark 4:35–41; Acts 27:1, 14–26; 1 Peter 5:6–11

Summary: This study will help us grow in faith during troubled times by finding out more about who Jesus really is. The study focuses on the experiences of David the shepherd, the faith-challenged disciples, the shipwrecked Paul, and the tempted Peter.

Ice Breaker

What is the 'stormiest' thing that ever happened to you?

How did you survive the storm?

I found a lifeboat that happened to be going by.

I have made previous preparations and had my lifeboat ready.

I was rescued by someone else.

I was part of a supportive group that went through the storm together.

What helped you survive the storm?

My own power and strength.

God.

Other people. _____

Bible Study

What is your favorite description from the 23rd Psalm?

Green pastures

Still water

Restoring my soul

Providing every need

Other _____

What do you think David had in mind with “walk through the valley”?

- Bears and lions who threatened the sheep
- Saul trying to kill him
- The problems within his family

In Mark 4:35-41, why did the apostles have faith problems after all of the miracles and teachings of chapters 1-4?

- They weren't paying attention
- They didn't know what to look for
- They had false expectations of what it meant to follow Jesus
- They had an incomplete view of who Jesus was

What is the key to Paul's confidence during the shipwreck?

- He had been shipwrecked before so he knew what to expect
- He knew the skill of the captain and crew
- He was a person of prayer
- He knew who Jesus was

What problems do you think Peter had in mind when he spoke of Satan as a roaring lion?

- His own denial of Jesus
- His lack of faith at the Transfiguration
- The times he had been persecuted as a follower of Jesus
- He was aware of the many problems other Christians had faced

Applying

Can a person make it through life's troubles without faith? Discuss the group's answers and the reasons given.

This lesson suggests that surviving storms depends on knowing who Jesus is. On a scale of 1 to 10, to what extent are faith and knowing who Jesus is the same thing? How are they the same? How are they different?

Do you think life is easier for a person of faith than for a person without faith? Why or why not?

As you reread Mark 1-4, are there any aspects of life that Jesus doesn't control? Which ones?

For those who have survived serious storms, what things built your faith in difficult days?

What advice would you give to others to help us prepare for the storms of life?

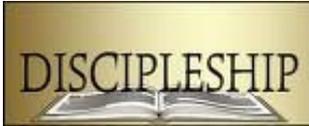
Connecting

Who do you know that is going through a storm right now? Make a prayer list of those mentioned by the group, and share it as a prayer guide in the coming week.

What can you specifically do or say to help the person you mentioned?

What can the group do to demonstrate the love of Christ or serve that person?

Make an agreement as a group (or with one other person in your group, not a family member) that you will share the troubles of life, and let at least one other person know when you need help, prayer, or encouragement.



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April 12, 2009

Session Three: Going Where Jesus Goes

Theme: *Going where Jesus goes has always been a risky proposition, but the rewards far outweigh the risk.*

Texts: Matthew 14:25–31; Luke 9:23–26; Acts 14:19–20; 16:1–3

Summary: Peter saw the power and significance of Jesus' life in His control over even the elements of nature, and Peter wanted to experience it too. He wanted to join Jesus in doing what only Jesus could do. Later when Peter correctly answered the question about Jesus' identity, Jesus said that the power to deny self, bear one's cross, and follow Jesus is intimately tied up in knowing who He is. Paul went where Jesus told him to go, even though it was different than his plans and his wisdom. In this lesson we ask, "What does it mean to go where Jesus goes in the 21st century?"

Ice Breaker

In our modern society, what are the places you think Jesus would go?

What are some places where Jesus would not go?

Which of your acquaintances would Jesus know?

Are there people among your acquaintances whom Jesus would not know?

When have you tried to go where Jesus goes, and struggled as Peter did with the waves?

When have your plans to follow Jesus ended in shipwreck? [Share the stories of those who will.]

When has Jesus wanted you to go somewhere or talk to someone, but that you would rather not?

Bible Study

What do you think was Peter's attitude when he asked Jesus if he could come to him on the tumultuous waves?

He was asking for permission to get out of the boat

He was asking for a confirmation that he was really seeing Jesus

He was expressing his faith (Lord, since it is you....)

He was asking if Jesus would empower him

He was asking Jesus to give him a superior place among the twelve

Jesus in this context suggests that losing life to find it involves cross bearing. How did the disciples respond?

Yippie! We all get crosses!
Give me a light one
Anything for my Lord
Later, Lord

What did the Macedonian call teach Paul?

Go wherever God wants you to go
Go where you can do the most good
God where people need you

Paul was left for dead as he sought to tell the story of Jesus. What is his attitude?

I am blessed to suffer for my Lord
I'm going to have to be more careful what I say and to whom I say it
Any price is too little, considering what God has done for me.

Applying

What is your attitude when Jesus tells you to come to him on the tumultuous waves of life?

That's OK, Lord, I have plenty to do right here in the boat
I'll go, but only if you walk beside me
Look at me go, Lord!

Which is closest to your attitude toward cross-bearing?

Yippie!
Give me a light one
Anything for my Lord
Later, Lord

What do you think is the Macedonian call for this church?

Go wherever you want to go
Go to the hurting people around you who need help
Go to your friends and neighbors
You can avoid the dirty parts of society if you'll work hard on attracting the Christians
Don't go to them, let them come to you

Paul was left for dead as he sought to tell the story of Jesus. What is your attitude?

I'll try as long as it doesn't hurt
I'll devote as much of my spare time to this as I can
Any price is too little, considering what God has done for me.

Connecting

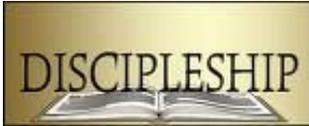
How can we help one another go where Jesus goes?

Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. Is it easier to go in pairs? Is there a lesson here that we need to learn?

Choose someone as a partner and commit together to doing one act of service in the coming week.

Who do you know that is interested in following Jesus? Put them on your daily prayer list and pray for them every day this week, as you seek opportunities to go where Jesus would go?

Remember our question this week: not WWJD (what would Jesus do?), but WWJG (where would Jesus go?)



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May 10, 2009

Session Four: Following Christ: Caring for Others

Theme: *God often meets people's needs through his followers.*

Texts: Luke 9:10–17; John 6:25–40; James 1:27, 2:14–19

Summary: This study challenges us to care about the needs of others as Jesus does. Jesus said, "When you do it for one of the least of my brothers, you do it for me" (Matt. 25:40). Serving others makes us like Christ; by serving others we serve Christ. Serving others is evidence that we are followers who possess the love of God (1 John 3:17-18). The Bible describes the church as the spiritual body of Christ, suggesting that Christ goes where the church goes. In the contemporary world, the spiritual body of Christ, the church, is the only way Christ has to care for people.

Ice Breakers

Can a person be a genuine follower of Christ and not be concerned about others?

Think of some "other" in your life. What does that person most need? Does Christ want you to provide it?

When have you had a special need and had it met by a disciple of Christ? How did you feel?

What did you think of the one who cared for you?

If you were to think about your level of caring for people who are not Christians, what season of life would it be for you? (spring, summer, fall, winter)

Bible Study

What did the disciples think when Jesus asked them to care for the multitude by feeding them?

You've got to be kidding!

Do you know how much food this is going to take?

Do you know how much this is going to cost?

You're asking too much of us.

What did the disciples think when Jesus spoke about being the bread of life?

How can we eat you?

We get it, but how can you convince people who are hungry?

You're going to drive people away with this kind of talk.

How is the work of a Christian usually defined?

Preach the gospel to your neighbors

Attend worship

Give regularly

Care for the needy

Live a pure life

[How does James define the work of a Christian?]

When people fail to do Christian works, including caring for others, it is because....

They don't have enough time

They lack faith

They don't know anyone in need

They don't think it's important

Applying

On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your own efforts in caring?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your church on caring?

What are the societal or cultural factors that deter our efforts to demonstrate our care?

What could your church do to increase its level of caring?

What could you personally do to increase your level of caring?

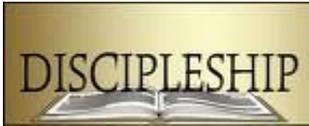
Connecting

Caring for others depends on connections. This week, ask at least one question a day of someone you meet in an effort to find a need you can help with.

Do something caring for someone when they don't expect it.

Find a "caring project" that you or members of your group can work on during the next few months, or during the July recess from small groups.

Try to consistently show your care to someone in trouble in an effort to bring them closer to the Lord.



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June 14, 2009

Session Five: Grateful for God's Grace

Theme: *Because we can never earn God's favor, grace is a difficult concept for us to grasp. Our actions are not meritorious, but God's favor is extended in special ways to those who respond to his love.*

Texts: Luke 11:23; John 1:1–17; Ephesians 1:3–23

Summary: This study will encourage and reassure you that God accepts you (by grace) and will give you the power to do anything he asks you to do (by grace).

Ice Breakers

When have you been most aware of God's grace in your life?

When have you been most grateful to God?

Are you more grateful at church or away from church?

Bible Study

When Jesus spoke of those with him and those against him, his disciples probably thought....

At least we're on the right side!

I wonder who he's talking about.

Are we with him?

How can he support people who are not with us?

That Jesus came as one full of grace and truth probably means....

Jesus came to treat other people right

Jesus came to accurately reveal God to the world

Jesus acted like no one else had ever acted because he came from the Father

He came as one to undo the negative impact of the Old Testament Law

John 1 is a passage about Jesus' identity, indicating the gift God gave. Which of the descriptions in this passage is most meaningful to you?

- Word of God
- Son of God
- Bringer of grace and truth
- Light and Life

God's grace in Ephesians 1 probably refers to....

- Every spiritual blessing in Christ
- Our selection to holiness
- Our setting apart as his sons through adoption
- Our redemption
- The establishment of the church under the headship of Jesus

Applying

As a group, make a list of the spiritual blessings in Christ mentioned in Ephesians 1. Which of these are you most grateful for? Why?

What are some of the dangers of overemphasizing God's grace to the elimination of human responsibility?

What are some of the dangers of overemphasizing human responsibility to the elimination of God's grace?

Connecting

Make an agreement to meet someone in your group this week (in person, or by phone) for the specific purpose of talking about God's grace.

This week, talk to at least one other person outside of your group (and outside of your church) about how grateful you are for the grace of God in your life.

Ask at least one other person how they understand grace.