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## Adult Small Group Facilitator Guide

## *The Stories We Live: Conversations about Calling*

This adult small group experience uses the book *The Stories We Live* as the primary content for the eight small group sessions. Groups of approximately 8-12 people will meet in small groups, led by a facilitator or facilitators. It is recommended that each person purchase a copy of *The Stories We Live* by Kathleen Cahalan (Eerdmans, 2017). The book is available in Our Giving Tree Bookstore for $10, or from online retailers like Amazon.com. A Kindle e-book version is also available from Amazon.com.

All generations will be experiencing the themes of *The Stories We Live* in age-appropriate ways and in occasional Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) intergenerational gatherings (Aug 29, Oct 3, Nov 14). We encourage everyone to participate in the GIFT nights and to include them in their plans for the study. A calendar of dates is provided below.

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| Meeting times are 6:30-7:30pm unless otherwise stated **Aug 29 - GIFT Night: Called to Follow Jesus**  Sept 5 – Chapter 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways  Sept 12 – Chapter 2. Called *to* Be Followers of Christ  Sept 19 - Chapter 3. Called *as* We Are  Sept 26 – Ch 4. Called *from* People, Places, or Situations  **Oct 3 – GIFT Night: Sharing our Stories**  Oct 10 - Chapter 5. Called *for* Service and Work  Oct 17 – Chapter 6. Called *through* Each Other  Oct 24 - Chapter 7. Called *in* Suffering  **Oct 31 – “The Monster Gospels” - 5:45pm FC  No *TSWL* Small Groups this evening**  Nov 7 - Chapter 8. Called *by* the God Within  **Nov 14 – GIFT Night: Callings All *around* Us** |  |

## Guidelines for Small Group Conversation

**Called to welcome others as Christ**. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, all people are to be “received like Christ.” We invite you to give and receive welcome by your words and actions towards others in the group.

**Called to be present to each other.** We all lead busy lives; that is why our time together is so important. As much as possible, focus your attention and energies on being engaged with those around you. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

**Called to share and to keep silent.** What is offered in this circle is by invitation, not demand. As we read in Ecclesiastes, there is “a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” No one is ever forced to respond to any question. We honor the right of each individual to decide when he or she feels called to share.

**Called to honor each voice.** We invite you to share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

**Called to listen with the “ear of your heart,”** according to the Rule of Benedict. This is a space for listening and learning from each other, not for critiquing or offering advice. While the group may provide support, we are not here to “fix” or “save” each other. Offer questions instead of counsel.

**Called to reserve judgment and turn to wonder**. Whenever people interact, disagreements naturally arise. But we invite you to turn from judgmental attitudes which stifle communication, to an attitude of wonder which opens the heart. If you find yourself reacting strongly, turn inward and ask yourself: “*I wonder why this person feels this way. I wonder why I feel such a strong reaction. I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself*.”

**Called to respect our differences**. Our time together is a conversation, not a debate. We invite you to learn from others and from yourself, to tap the sources of wisdom in the group and in your own heart.

**Called to keep confidentiality**. Vocation is a deeply personal topic, and we respect the sacredness of our stories: our fears and failures, sorrows and successes. The circle of the group provides a space that is open to share within, but closed from sharing outside. What is shared in the circle stays in the circle.

**Called to pray**. When the group leaves from this space, we invite you to hold each other’s lives and stories in prayer until you meet again. Following the Benedictine rule of “ora et labora” (prayer and work), we hope that your time together will enrich both your prayer and your work when you are apart.

(Guidelines adapted from Parker Palmer’s “Circle of Trust ‘Touchstones’” from the Center for Courage and Renewal. To learn more about the Rule of Benedict, visit the Order of St. Benedict: [www.osb.org/rb](http://www.osb.org/rb))

## *The Stories We Live* Small Group Schedule

**Facilitator(s):**

**Contact Info:**

**Room:**

#### The Meeting times are 6:30-7:30pm unless otherwise stated

**Aug 29 GIFT Night: Called to Follow Jesus**

Sept 5 Chapter 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways

Sept 12 Chapter 2. Called *to* Be Followers of Christ

Sept 19 Chapter 3. Called *as* We Are

Sept 26 Ch 4. Called *from* People, Places, or Situations

**Oct 3 GIFT Night: Sharing our Stories**

Oct 10 Chapter 5. Called *for* Service and Work

Oct 17 Chapter 6. Called *through* Each Other

Oct 24 Chapter 7. Called *in* Suffering

**Oct 31 “The Monster Gospels” with Jason Korsiak, 5:45pm in Fellowship Center  
No *TSWL* Small Groups this evening**

Nov 7 Chapter 8. Called *by* the God Within

**Nov 14 GIFT Night: Callings All *around* Us**

## Session 2. Called *to* be Followers of Christ

**Supplies Needed**

* Handout: “Following Jesus Today”
* Bibles for each group of participants (Part 3)
* Cookies or other baked treats if you want to add an extra dimension to the optional video component
* Leader: Chapter 2 in *The Stories We Live*
* Leader Reference: *Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling*. Kathleen Cahalan and Laura Kelly Fanucci. Twenty Third Publications, 2015.
* Participants: *The Stories We Live.* Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.

#### Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Welcome group members by name, and invite them to make a nametag. As you begin, invite the group into a time of silent centering. Conclude the silence with this prayer or another of your choosing.

#### We have heard your glorious whisper,

#### Almost silent, yet insistent,

#### Breaking through the chatter

#### Of many voices,

#### The clatter

#### Of background noises,

#### The wind,

#### The rain,

#### Storm and hurricane,

#### Through all of this

#### Your voice remains,

#### Unchangeable,

#### Cuts through to heart

#### And soul,

#### Unmissable.

#### 'Come follow me

#### Pick up the Cross…

#### My burden is no burden at all,

#### It is simply love,

#### Poured out for you

#### And through you,

#### Sustaining,

#### Empowering …

#### Come follow me'

#### Faith and Worship: <http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Christian_calling.htm#ixzz5Qb8OfnNu>

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#### Part 1. Introduction (1 min)

Introduce the concept of *called to follow Jesus* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

Jesus called his disciples to follow him rather the disciples choosing to follow him. Jesus’s “way” was radical, requiring disciples to give up loyalty to job, family, friends, and nation in order to embrace Jesus’ way of life. As disciples of Jesus today, we are called in the following ways: to be a follower, a worshipper, a witness, a neighbor, a forgiver, a prophet, and a steward.

We have a common, shared calling as Christians. Discipleship is our most foundational and fundamental identity and vocation—we are called *together* to be a community of disciples.

#### Part 2. Explore: Called to Be a Follower (10 min)

Invite a group member to read the story aloud: “Jesus Calls the First Disciples” in Matthew 4:18-5:2:

*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 sea—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. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying. . . .*

[Jesus continues here with the Sermon on the Mount]

Share with the group:

The opening scene of Jesus’ ministry after his baptism is all action—he walks, calls, teaches, proclaims, cures, hikes, sits down, and speaks. If you are going to follow, you have to get and get going even if you are in the middle of something. If you don’t follow immediately, you are going to miss it: you won’t hear his teaching or witness him cure the sick or see the great crowds coming or finally sit at his feet to listen.

Reflect:

Ask each person to take a few moments to reflect on the question below and share their responses in pairs or triads.

* ***How has Christ called you to follow him today?***

**OR**

* ***What does it mean for you to be a follower of Christ today?***

#### Part 2 (Optional). Video Exploration - Vocation as Worship: Ella’s Story (20 min)

Video:

Share the video “Vocation as Worship - Ella Russell” (7:30). Thumb drives with the video files are available from the adult ministries office. You can also find it online at <http://bit.ly/crumbhead>. Since this video is about baked goods, you might want to have some cookies or other treats available for your group members to enjoy.

Reflect:

After the video, invite reflections using some of the following questions:

* **What did you notice about Ella or the video “visual poem”?**
* **What struck you as significant, beautiful or important?**
* **What connections does Ella make between her baptism, her call, and her work?**

#### Part 3. Explore: Six Ways of Following Jesus (25-40 min)

Break your group into six pairs or trios. If you have fewer people, some may work individually, or you might assign two segments to a pair. If at all possible, cover all six segments. Assign one of six ways we follow Jesus—worshipper, witness, neighbor, forgiver, prophet, and steward—to each pair or triad.

Using the handout as a resource, ask each group to reflect on the focusing question and commentary. They might also want to read the suggested Scripture passage (or another one of your choosing). Ask each prepare a brief summary of their reflections with the whole group.

After groups have finished their reflection time, ask each group to share their summary reflections with the whole group.

The commentary for each question is adapted from *Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling* by Kathleen Cahalan and Laura Fanucci.

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***worshipper***—one whose heart is filled with adoration and love for the source of life, the One on whom we depend?

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 8:1-13

Traditionally, Christians have worshipped God through different types of prayer: praising God in adoration, seeking God’s forgiveness through confession, thanking God for blessings, and petitioning God for our needs and those of others (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***witness*** to what God has done for us?

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 24:36-49

To be a witness means to give testimony, to proclaim, or to announce a message. Witness is to give testimony to the truth about what God has done for us, in and through Jesus Christ.

When we live our callings, when we tell each other how God has called us, or when we admit how hard it can be to figure out what to do and what God wants—that is be a witness. It is tell a truth about our lives , about our certainties, and our doubts, our fears, and our joys.

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***neighbor*** to those around you?

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 14:12-14, Luke 10:25-37

Jesus neighbor ethic is built on the Great Commandment that unites love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus expands his teaching on neighbor to the point of embracing love for one’s enemies. Jesus tackles the question of who is the neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Neighbors are neighbors (people we know), strangers (whether near or far), and enemies (critics and opponents). By stretching our instincts past our comfort zone to include these widening circles of neighbors, strangers, and enemies, we enter into discipleship’s view of “neighbor-hood” as a state of being in which all are drawn together in the household of God.

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***forgiver***—to forgive those who harm us and seek forgiveness when we harm others.

* Suggested Scripture: Luke 7:36-50,

Learning to be a forgiver begins with first recognizing that I am a sinner and that my actions hurt other people. I have to start with seeking forgiveness. When I am forgiven, then I know love and I can learn to practice forgiving others. Forgiving others for their sins against me requires great love.

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***prophet***—to declare what is wrong with our communities and world, and call people back to right relationship through justice and mercy.

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 21:10-14

To be a prophet is to see what is wrong, broken, missing, or unjust in our society and to speak a word of truth that shines light on the situation. Prophets see the world as God sees the world and seek to share their vision with others.

Acting prophetically is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. To be a prophet can be an uncomfortable part of the call to discipleship. But it is also what I cannot *not* do as a follower of Christ. What is unjust about our time and place? How are we complicit in systems that contribute to the oppression of others? Where do we need to help call people back to God’s ways of mercy, forgiveness, justice, and peace?

1. How do you follow Jesus as a ***steward***—caring for God’s creation and the goods of the household.

* Suggested Scripture: Matthew 25:14-29

The call to stewardship means receiving gifts gratefully, nurturing their growth, and sharing them with others. The call to stewardship is the call to take care—of people, of places, and of talents and skills we have been given to share. Like the stewards in Jesus’ parable, we have been entrusted with God’s gifts in the expectation that we will allow them to grow over time. So we are called to be steward with our whole lives: stewards of our work and of our world around us.

#### Part 4. Conclusion (1 min)

Conclude the session with your own reflections and/or the following information from Kathleen Cahalan:

We follow the One who follows in Abba’s way, for Jesus is the perfect disciple, the perfect follower. He teaches disciples what it means to embrace God’s mission with our whole lives when he accepted his death and placed his trust completely in God. In order to flow, we must come to him, sit at his feet, and learn how to do this. To be a follower means entering into a lifelong process of learning from Jesus, to come to know who and what Jesus is and what Jesus is claiming about God’s call to community and mission.

We live, then, in Christ because Christ lives in us. To be Christ’s follower is to embrace Christ as teacher, to seek wisdom and understanding for what the path and cost of discipleship entails, and to be schooled in the paschal mystery of death and new life. (*Living Your Discipleship*, 19-20)

#### Closing Reflection and Prayer (2 min)

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#### Today

#### and all days

#### embrace us in a love that knows no end.

#### Today

#### and all days

#### fill us with a power that overcomes.

#### Today

#### and all days

#### encourage us with a word that nourishes.

#### Today

#### and all days

#### inspire us with a hope that sustains.

#### Today

#### and all days

#### comfort us with a peace that endures.

#### Today

#### and all days

#### bring wholeness of body, mind and spirit

#### Today

#### and all days Amen.

#### Faith and Worship: <http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Discipleship.htm#ixzz5Qb9BtABt>

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## Following Jesus Today

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(OVER)

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