



# CREATING A CULTURE OF CALLING

## Young Adult & Adult Faith Formation Program *The Call to Discipleship*

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*The Call to Discipleship can be used in a large group or small group setting.*

*For a large group setting, the facilitator can present the content of the “Discovering” section, while in a small group setting this involves reading by the participants.*

### **Focusing**

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they left their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

### **Gathering**

*Begin this session by reading the Gospel story from Mark. Throughout our lives each of us have experiences of being called – into a relationship, to a new job, to a new project or activity. Take a moment to reflect personally on one experience of being called and then share your reflections with your group.*

- 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?

## Reflecting

*This small group session focuses on the call to discipleship – to follow Jesus. We follow people who fascinate us or attract us because of who they are, what they stand for, and how they live. Jesus has fascinated people for twenty centuries. Take a moment to reflect on what fascinates you about Jesus of Nazareth and then share your reflections with your group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion.*

- Imagine yourself living in the days of Jesus of Nazareth. You are part of the crowds that follow Jesus on his journeys. You listen as he teaches and watch as he heals and forgives. What do you find fascinating about Jesus of Nazareth?

## Discovering

*The Gospels provide us with many insights into what the people of Jesus' time found fascinating about him. Their fascination with him – and his message and actions – attracted them to follow him. Take several minutes now to read the essay **What Fascinates People About Jesus of Nazareth**. In this essay you will discover six qualities of Jesus that fascinated people about Jesus and attracted people to follow him.*

### **What Fascinates People About Jesus of Nazareth**

- Jesus comes at life with energy and purpose.
- Jesus demonstrates great care and compassion.
- Jesus' care moves him to heal.
- Jesus' compassion moves him to forgive.
- Jesus offers and lives freedom.
- Jesus' love and compassion include everyone.

## Sharing

*Take a moment to reflect on the meaning of the essay for you. Use the following questions to guide your reflection, and then share your reflections with your group. Discuss the first set of questions before moving on to the second set.*

### **Part One: Discussing the Essay**

- What is it about these six qualities that move people to follow Jesus?
- Which of the six qualities of Jesus most fascinated you?
- What new insights into the life of Jesus did you discover by reading this essay?

### **Part Two: Applying the Essay**

- What would other young adults find attractive about Jesus today? How does Jesus respond to the hungers of young adults today?
- What do you, personally, find fascinating about Jesus?
- What are the benefits of following Jesus today?

## Living

### Reflect on the Meaning of Discipleship

*Find a quiet place this week to pray, read the Scriptures, and reflect on the meaning of discipleship for you. Use this quote from Brennan Hill to begin your reflection.*

Discipleship is about calling. It is about Jesus uniquely calling each of us to follow him. When we read the earliest Christians' writings, which still bear the memories of those who knew Jesus, we see people who had a deep affection for him and who found happiness in imitating his life. Answering Jesus' call to "Come follow me" (Mk 1:17) has helped many better deal with that haunting questions, "*What am I supposed to do with my life?*"

### Read the Stories of Discipleship

- To learn more about what fascinated people about Jesus read the Gospel examples identified in the essay.
- To learn more about the people who followed Jesus read the Gospel passages on the handout, *Spending Time with People Who Followed Jesus*.

## Praying

*Close the session by praying together...*

Come, Lord Jesus, startle me with your presence,  
life-sustaining as air,  
to open my heart to praise you,  
to open my mind to attend you,  
to open my spirit to worship you,  
to open me to live my life as authentically and boldly as you lived yours.  
Come, Lord Jesus, be with me in my longing;  
come stay with me in my needing;  
come, go with me in my doing;  
come, struggle with me in my searching;  
come, rejoice with me in my loving.  
Amen.

(Excerpted from *Guerrillas of Grace* by Ted Loder, Luramedia, 1984.)

# What Fascinates People about Jesus of Nazareth

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## Jesus comes at life with energy and purpose.

This active quality means that Jesus influences the course of events more than the course of events influences him. He is proactive, rather than reactive. We see this in his focus on his mission in life (see Luke 4:16-21) and in the way he shapes situations according to his perspectives and values. Jesus moves out of an inner energy and fullness. His assertiveness can be seen in how he called the disciples to follow him (Mark 1:16; John 15:16).

Jesus finds himself in many different situations which he must quickly evaluate and respond to. Yet his responses never seem to be mere reaction. Circumstances (the disciples not understanding, the crowd-blocking petitioners, hungry people with nowhere to go, etc.) may be pushing events in a certain direction, or people sent to trap and test Jesus may be manipulating the situation for their own ends. But once Jesus intervenes, the situation is reshaped according to his will.

The stories about people “coming at” Jesus often end with Jesus “coming at” them. Tables turn with remarkable regularity; would-be challengers find themselves challenged. The ability of Jesus to reverse challenge is a part of his active rather than reactive style. Even during Jesus’ arrest, trial, passion, and crucifixion he is portrayed as the predominant influence in the events he is undertaking.

The outcome of this powerful “inner to outer” way of living, is that Jesus is an explosive power that must be reckoned with. He is a force because the Kingdom he proclaimed and served is a force. People who live out of this spiritual energy go with the flow and invent their talents rather than bury themselves.

### Gospel Examples of Energy and Purpose

Mission of Jesus: Luke 4:16-21

Woman Caught in Sin: John. 8:3-11

Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

## Jesus demonstrates great care and compassion.

Jesus is a man of care and compassion. His care makes him hyper-attentive to what people say and do, fuels an unrelenting passion to heal, urges him to compassionately share the blessings and curses of being human, promotes the courage of unlimited forgiveness, and engenders an anger which is not righteous but the way great love grieves. These qualities comprise Jesus’ capacity to care.

Jesus is attentive to the people around him. He notices short people in tall trees (See Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10), the humble, furtive hand of a widow by the coffers (Mark 12:41), the hunger of a twelve year old girl come back from the dead (Mark 5:43), unimportant street children shoved away (Mark 9:13), a cry for pity from the perimeter of the crown (Mark 10:46-52), and a touch on his cloak that is different from all the rest, a touch which communicates a little more panic, a little more pleading, a touch of twelve years’ bleeding (Mark 5:31).

Jesus embraces both the joy and the pain of life. He celebrates and cries; he rejoices and is angry. His care makes him receive each moment as if it were the only moment. He does not suffer from world-weariness. This sensitivity to everything as new was part of Jesus' make-up. Every time he breathed in, he was conscious that God had breathed out. At every moment everything came from the love of God.

Compassion is the experience of feeling the other's life as one's own. Three of Jesus' most powerful stories turn on the experience of compassion. The Samaritan looks on the man in the ditch with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 10:25-37). The Father looks at his son with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Luke 15:11-31). The king looks on the servant with compassion and an action occurs that changes the world of the story and the world of the listeners to the story (Matthew 18:21-35).

Compassion is the feeling-perception which emerges from the empathic center where God, the self, and the neighbor join. It is so great that it does not stop at the feeling of solidarity but galvanizes the person into works of solidarity. Jesus feels and acts out of compassion when he sees the sick (Matthew 14:14), meets hungry people (Matthew 15:32; Mk 8:11), when a leper petitions him (Mark 1:41), and when he sees a widow walking in the funeral procession of her son (Luke 7:13).

### **Gospel Examples of Care and Compassion**

A Widow's Son: Luke 7:11-16

Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-31

A King Who Forgives: Matthew 18:21-35

## **Jesus' care moves him to heal.**

A leper says to Jesus, "If you will to do it, you can cure me." Jesus responds, "Of course, I will it!" Everything rides on his "Of course." The leper and Jesus share the same concern – his well being. The overflow of care into the desire to heal suffuses the portrait of Jesus. He is pictured as a man seeking out the sick and possessed. But, once word gets out, they seek him out. Often someone comes to him with a request to come and heal or exorcise someone he or she loves. In the end, Jesus is waiting for people to heal them. While they were looking for him, he was seeking them.

### **Gospel Examples of Healing**

Blind Man: John 9:1-7, 35-38

Sick Man: John 5:1-8

Official's Son: John 4:43-53; Luke 7:1-10

Crippled Man: Luke 5:17-25

Two Blind Men: Matthew 20:29-34

A Dying Girl and a Sick Woman: Luke 8:40-55; Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43

## **Jesus' compassion moves him to forgive.**

In the stories of Jesus there is a very close link between compassion and forgiveness. In the three stories where compassion is the inner experience of the characters, the outer expression is forgiveness. Once the prodigal father and the king experience compassion, they are moved to forgive the son and the servant; and the lawyer who heard the story of the compassionate Samaritan construes his action not merely in terms of help but in terms of mercy. Since it is assumed that the man in the ditch is a Jew, and more precisely, is the listening lawyer himself, the Samaritan has to overcome the history of hostility between them. His care flows from his ability to forgive and to get beyond racial hatred. It must be stressed that the father, the king, and the Samaritan have been wronged by the people they forgive and help. There is something in the experience of compassion that facilitates the most difficult and yet the most creative of all human actions – heartfelt forgiveness.

In the Gospel portrait Jesus' stories and teaching about forgiveness are matched by his actions. He forgives his disciples and those who crucified him. His major emphasis is to offer divine forgiveness to all who have sinned. It is this experience of divine compassion and forgiveness mediated through Jesus which is the energy of inter-human forgiveness (see Luke 6:36-38). Jesus hoped to initiate a spirit of forgiveness just as self-perpetuating as the spiral of violence.

### **Gospel Examples of Forgiveness**

Woman Caught in Sin: John 8:3-11

Healing a Crippled Man: Luke 5:17-25

A Man with Demons: Luke 8:26-39, Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20

## **Jesus offers and lives freedom.**

Jesus' words and deeds offered freedom *from* the power of Satan, from crippling disease, from debilitating worry, from ego-centered striving, from burdensome religious obligations, from imprisonment in social categories, from economic hardship. The reverse side was a freedom *for* obedience to God's rule, for bodily health, for a life of trust, for other-centered concerns, for true worship, for genuine encounters with people, and for a more just economic order. Jesus' presence was liberating in the physical, interpersonal, social, and spiritual realms.

Jesus lived freedom. His life demonstrated a detachment from all the trappings of worldly status or power. He did not "cling" to his life, but gave it freely in service to others, even to death on the cross. He was faithful to his mission and identity right to the end. This detachment and faithfulness makes Jesus "dangerous," for as every ruler knows, the person with nothing to lose is free to speak the truth. Jesus died as he lived, the free person.

## **Jesus' love and compassion include everyone.**

Jesus' compassion and inclusiveness challenged the prevailing social order of his day. Jesus interacts with all levels of Jewish society, from religious leader to social outcast. No one seems automatically excluded from his concern or company. Those whom the societal leaders spurned, Jesus embraced.

Jesus ate and drank with “tax collectors and sinners,” an umbrella category for the religiously unclean and the socially unacceptable. The leaders saw this table fellowship as blurring the boundaries between the righteous and the sinner.

Jesus also reached out to the poor. He counted himself among them because he “has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). He preached to them that they had a dignity which no societal estimation could compromise. The opening line of the Beatitudes is as startling today as in Jesus’ time. “Blessed are you poor” (Luke 6:20). He challenged the leaders of the day because they neglected the plight of the poor. Jesus afflicted the comfortable and comforted the afflicted.

Women were also severely constricted by society. Jesus’ relationship with women broke many of the customs and conventions of his day. He talked to women in public; he had close women friends and some of his disciples were women.

The overall picture is that whatever society had dismissed, devalued, or forgotten, Jesus pursued. Jesus did not exclude anybody on the basis of group affiliation or on the unchosen givens of the human condition. Jesus is not prejudiced; he takes each person on his or her merits. What is fascinating and liberating about Jesus is that he encountered the next person met as precisely that, the next person met – unique with a dignity given by God.

### **Gospel Examples of Inclusion**

The Great Banquet: Luke 14:15-23 and Matthew 22:1-10

(This material is adapted and excerpted from Chapter Three in *Spirit Master* by John Shea, Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1987)

# Spending Time with People Who Followed Jesus

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## **Andrew**

Matthew 4:18-20 and 10:1-5, Mark 13:3ff, John 1:35-42, 6:1-15, and 12:20-26

## **Mary Magdalene**

Matthew 27:55-61 and 28:1-10, Mark 15:42-47 and 16:1-8, Luke 8:1-3, John 19:38-42 and 20:1-18

## **Matthew**

Matthew 9:9-13 and 10:1-15, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32

## **Nicodemus**

John 3:1-21, 7:45-52, and 19:38-42

## **Thomas**

Matthew 10:1-15, John 11:1-6, 14:1-14 and 20:24-29

## **Mary - Mother of Jesus**

Matthew 1:18-24, Luke 2:1-20, John 2:1-5; 19:25-27

## **Peter**

Matthew 4:18-22 and 14:21-28, Mark 14:32-41 and 14:66-72, John 1:35-42, 21:15-19, and 13:3-20

## **Paul**

Acts 9:1-31 and 26:2-23

## **Zacchaeus**

Luke 19:1-9

## **The Samaritan Woman**

John 4:1-42