



CREATING A CULTURE OF CALLING

Young Adult & Adult Faith Formation Program *The Challenge of Discipleship*

The Challenge of 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

I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. (Luke 6:47-48)

Reflecting

This small group session focuses on the challenge of discipleship – Jesus’ instructions for living the Christian life. Take a moment to reflect on your understanding of what Jesus taught in the Gospels about living 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.

- Identify what you believe are the most important “instructions for living” that Jesus taught his disciples in the Gospels.
- What do you think is unique about the teaching and insight of Jesus that we find in the Gospels?

Discovering

We begin our discovery into the challenge of discipleship by exploring the mission of Jesus – the vision that guides Jesus in his ministry, and then we turn to the message of Jesus.

The Mission of Jesus - To Announce the Reign of God

Learn about Jesus' mission by reading two passages from the Gospel of Luke: Luke 4:16-21 and Luke 7:18-22. Then read the brief essay below.

The Kingdom of God

The central theme of Jesus' ministry and message was the coming of the reign of God (or kingdom of God). The very first words from the mouth of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark place the reign of God at the core of Jesus' proclamation: "...Jesus went to Galilee and told the good news that comes from God. He said, "The time has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15).

"The key to comprehending Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God, therefore, is in understanding his conviction about the passionate, unrestricted, unconditional love of God – and the power of that love to release and free people to love one another unconditionally, without restrictions. The Reign of God becomes real when God reigns over the hearts of people, and God reigns over the hearts of people when people are in tune with God's will. It has been said that "the will of God is the good of people." This means that when people conform their lives to God's will, there will be peace, joy, and love for all – that is, the Kingdom of God will be fully realized." (Thomas Zanzig, *Jesus of History, Christ of Faith*, page 130)

Through his actions and relationships Jesus gives witness to the meaning of the reign of God. The reign of God is present in and through Jesus and it is evident in the startling way in which he is able to touch and change the lives of those around him. When we look at what Jesus says and does, we see what God says and does. Jesus lives the great commandment to love God and neighbor without any limits. He expresses his love in specific actions of service, compassion, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation.

It is very important to understand Jesus' special concern for the poor and those on the margins of society. Jesus eats with the poor and sinners. He is a friend of tax gatherers and prostitutes and other unsound members of first century Jewish society. He cures the sick and heals the possessed – outcasts in Jewish society of the first century. All of these people are the "poor" or marginalized. They receive particular attention in the Kingdom because of who God is. God's mercy and compassion for the defenseless assures benefits to the poor in the kingdom.

The Message of Jesus - The Good News of the Reign of God

One way to think about the message of Jesus in the Gospels is to envision what he teaches as a set of instructions for living as a Christian. Jesus' teachings addresses the vision, values, and actions that must characterize the life of a disciple. The essential message of Jesus can be found in four key Gospel passages.

- The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew chapters 5-7

- The Sermon on the Plain: Luke 6:20-49
- The Greatest Commandment: Luke 10:29-37; Matthew 22:34-40
- The Final Judgment: Matthew 25:31-46

Learn more about Jesus' vision for the Christian life by reading the following passages. Luke 6:20-49, Matthew 22:34-40, and Matthew 25:31-46. As you read the passage ask yourself, "What is Jesus asking his disciples to believe and to live in each of these three passages?" (You may want to divide the three passages among different members of the group.)

Discuss as a group your responses to the question, "What is Jesus asking his disciples to believe and to live in each of these three passages?"

Now take a few moments to read the handout, **Key Themes of Jesus' Message**. As you read the essay connect these key themes with the insights your group surfaced from reading the three Gospel passages.

Sharing

Take a moment to reflect on the questions in Part One first; and then, as a group discuss everyone's reflections. Then take a moment to reflect on the questions in Part Two and share your responses with the group.

Part One: Discussing the Message of Jesus

- What struck you as significant or even new about the message of Jesus that you discovered by reading the Gospel passages and the handout?
- The wisdom of Jesus often contrasts with the "wisdom of the world." Consider Jesus' teachings on love, reconciliation, poverty and riches, and justice (to name a few), and compare and contrast Jesus' wisdom with the wisdom of the world (the conventional thinking in our society) about these matters.
- What would the world be like if we took seriously Jesus' message? What would it look like? What would have to change?

Part Two: Applying the Message of Jesus to My Life

- What are some of the challenges of living the wisdom of Jesus in our world today?
- What would have to change in my life to live the message of Jesus more fully?
- How I can find the support and strength to meet the challenge of discipleship today?

Living

Living as a Disciple of Jesus

*Take several minutes at the close of the session to examine your life as a disciple using the handout, **Living as a Disciple of Jesus**. Be sure to complete the prayer: "Jesus help me to live as your disciple by..."*

Share your reflections in the group. Use your prayer to close the session.

Jesus' Mission – My Mission

Find time this week to reflect on your mission in life.

Use the following questions to discover your personal mission. Then shape your responses into a short paragraph or two.

- What do I feel are my greatest strengths? What strengths have others noticed in me?
- What do I deeply enjoy doing?
- Who are the one or two people that have made the greatest positive impact on my life? Why have they made such a significant impact?
- What have been the happiest moments of my life? Why were they happy?
- If I had unlimited time and resources for a full week, what would I choose to do?
- What do I enjoy doing for others?
- What are my most important goals in life? What do I hope to accomplish in my life?
- What inspires me? What brings out my passion and my commitment?

Now reflect on Jesus' mission as found in Luke 4:16-21 and Luke 7:18-22. Can you see the mission of Jesus in your mission? How can you strengthen your mission to reflect the challenge of living as a disciple today?

Read the Gospel Message

Find a quiet place this week to pray, read the Scriptures, and reflect on how you can live the message of Jesus more fully today.

- Read the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel Matthew, Chapters 5-7.
- Read the Gospel passages on the handout, *Key Themes of Jesus' Message*, that you have not already read in this session.

Plan for Growing as a Disciple

Spend some time this week developing a personal plan for living the message of Jesus more fully.

- Develop specific practices that you can begin now – such as examining your attitudes about money and materialism, reconciling with someone who has hurt you, getting involved in service to those in need, thinking about your career goals, etc.
- Identify the obstacles to implementing your practices, as well as the supports and resources you have for overcoming these obstacles. Then begin!

Praying

Close the session by praying together the prayers each individual member wrote in response to “Jesus help me to live as your disciple by...”

Key Themes of Jesus' Message

The call to love one another and ourselves.

Jesus said that our love for one another is a sign by which others will know that we are his disciples (John 13:34-35). Jesus said that we need to love others as we love ourselves and to remember that we are always loved by God.

Key Passages: John 13:34-35; Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25, 10:25-37

The call to love even our enemies.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ...If you love those who love you,” Jesus said, “what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:27, 32)

Key Passages: Luke 6:27-36; Matthew 5:43-48

The call to forgive one another and always to seek reconciliation with one another.

Jesus said that we cannot ask forgiveness for our own sins unless we are also ready to forgive those who sin against us (Mt. 6:12). Jesus said that we should not presume to offer sacrifice to God unless and until we have been reconciled with our brother or sister (Matthew 5:23-24).

Key Passages: Matthew. 5:23-24, 6:12-15, 18:21-22; Luke 15:11-32, 11:4, 17:4

The call to renounce revenge.

“If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also” (Luke 6:29).

Key Passages: Luke 6:27-36; Matthew 5:38-48

The call to avoid judging and condemning others.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

...First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye” (Luke 6:37,42).

Key Passages: Luke 6:37-42, Matthew 7:1-6, John 8:1-11

The call to avoid self-righteousness, presumption, and resentment toward others.

Jesus repudiated the proud Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14) and the resentful elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:25-30). He condemned those who try to shut the doors of the kingdom of God so that others could not enter it (Matthew 23:13-15) and said the publicans and prostitutes would enter the kingdom before their detractors would (Matthew 21:31-32).

Key Passages: Luke 15:25-30, 18:10-15; Matthew 6:2-4, 21:31-32, 23:1-33

The call to befriend those whom society looks down upon.

Jesus made himself the friend of the outcasts (Mt. 11:19) and did not avoid their company (Mark 2:16).

Key Passages: Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:16-17; Luke 8:26-39, 14:12-14

The call to serve one another, humbly and unselfishly.

Jesus gave us an example when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:4-17). “But when you give a banquet,” he said, “invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:13-14).

Key Passages: John 13:4-17; Luke 14:12-14, 22:27

The call to serve the poor.

Jesus singled out the poor in the beatitudes, insisting that the reign of God will be theirs (Luke 6:20), as did Mary in her Magnificat: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). Jesus’ parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is particularly compelling. Indeed, Pope John Paul II frequently cites it in summoning the Church to the service of the poor and powerless.

Key Passages: Luke 1:52-53, 6:20, 16:19-31; Matthew 25:31-46

The corresponding call to beware of riches and the attachment to possessions.

Jesus said it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God (Mk. 10:25). He said that those who would be his disciples should be ready to sell all that they have and give to the poor (Mark 10:21).

Key Passages: Matthew 6:24, 19:16-30; Luke 12:13-21, 16:19-31, 18:18-29; Mark 10:17-31

The call always to be just in our dealings with others.

Jesus attacked the scribes and Pharisees for straining at gnats and swallowing camels and for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, including justice first (Matthew 23:23).

Key Passages: Matthew 23:23-24; Luke 11:42; Mark 12:38-40

The call to pray always and with complete trust in God.

Jesus said that we should pray in complete confidence to God, “Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you” (Matthew 7:7).

Key Passages: Matthew 6:5-15, 7:7-11; Luke 11:2-4 and 9-13, 18:1-14

Living as a Disciple of Jesus

How are you living the challenge of being a disciple of Jesus today? Take a moment to reflect on each of these key teachings and rate yourself:

- ❶ This is too hard to do.
- ❷ I've got a lot of work to do if I'm going to live this.
- ❸ I'm working to live this.
- ❹ This is one of my strengths as a disciple.

to love God with all my heart, soul, and mind	❶	❷	❸	❹
to love other people as much as I love myself	❶	❷	❸	❹
to love even my enemies	❶	❷	❸	❹
to forgive others and always to seek reconciliation	❶	❷	❸	❹
to renounce revenge	❶	❷	❸	❹
to avoid judging and condemning others	❶	❷	❸	❹
to befriend those whom society looks down upon	❶	❷	❸	❹
to serve the needs of others, humbly and unselfishly	❶	❷	❸	❹
to serve the poor and those in need	❶	❷	❸	❹
to beware of riches and attachment to possessions	❶	❷	❸	❹
to be just in my dealings with others	❶	❷	❸	❹
to pray always and trust in God	❶	❷	❸	❹

My Prayer

Jesus help me to live as your disciple by....
(name a way you want Jesus to help you grow)