

session four

Ministers become living examples

FOCUS Disciples who have experienced the power of Jesus at work through them for the sake of others are challenged to accept that same power to make needed changes in their own lives. These personal changes flow from a relationship with Jesus that continues to deepen and grow more intimate. Disciples are challenged to integrate their relationship to Jesus into every aspect of their lives — a commitment that involves dedication to new faith practices.

PRAYER Invite the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds to insight and wisdom. Pray for changed wills and new behaviors that give expression to a growing commitment to Jesus. Pray for the relationship with Jesus to be renewed and deepened. Give thanks for spiritually mature people in your congregation. Ask the Spirit to teach you through the example of their visible commitment and lifestyle.

OPENING DISCUSSION *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Tell about a project you took part in that grew as it was being completed — one change led to additional changes. What was the project and what were the results?
- Tell about a project you began and realized that the project had quickly exceeded your expertise. What did you do then? Did you call in the experts to finish it for you, or find some other way to increase your skill?
- Name those who are or have been important examples or role models for your life? Why do you respect them and desire to follow their example? What qualities do they possess?
- What was the most challenging thing you have ever been asked to do as a disciple of Jesus? How did you deal with that challenge?
- Is there a difference between the way Jesus challenged his followers and the way we challenge disciples today? How would you describe that difference?

SEARCHING SCRIPTURE *Read Luke 9:18-26; 46-62 aloud.*

1. Only by knowing Jesus intimately, understanding who he is, observing the power of his love to transform lives, and allowing his love to flow through our lives in ministry to others are we prepared for the rest of the story. Jesus tells his disciples first what he will experience: suffering, rejection, death, and then resurrection. *The obvious question is if that is what is in store for him, what should his disciples expect? What does it mean to you to “bear a cross”? How does “bearing the cross” fit with today’s expectations of the “good life”?*
2. Jesus invited his followers to be bold in their proclamation of who he is. As they followed him, they were introduced into the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught them about the nature and characteristics of that Kingdom. The question was, were they ready to live in the greater reality of that Kingdom? The world view of this Kingdom of God is dramatically different from our own. *How is Jesus’ definition of “greatness” different? How is competition handled in the Kingdom? What do those differences mean to us as we seek to live in Jesus’ Kingdom?*

3. Choose other portions of this season's reading for this session that also demonstrate the more difficult and demanding aspects of being a disciple. *How is living in the Kingdom different from living in the world?*
4. *What does it mean to say that who we are as disciples is demonstrated by how we live? How do these texts demonstrate that truth? What does it mean for you to live as a "visible" disciple of Jesus? In what way can that be a cross? In what way is it a privilege?*

K E Y C O M P O N E N T O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

The disciples become living examples and role models as they grow in their relationship with Jesus.

1. Jesus challenges his disciples with a new view of reality called the Kingdom of God. The invitation is to live in the reality of his Kingdom now. As disciples accept the deeper demands of this call, their lives are completely transformed and become integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This freedom is only through obedience to Jesus and all he commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others. *What does the transformed life mean to you? In what way have you been a model for others? How have others been a model for you?*
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, *"To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ's work in us is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of Christ incarnate, crucified and glorified."* (*Cost of Discipleship*, p. 301) *How can an intentional focus on transformation best happen in your congregation? What do small groups and the study of the Word have to do with that transformation?*
3. There are seven major "faith practices" that are a part of the "Call to Discipleship." They are important to look at here because they are essential lifestyle practices of the transformed disciple.

PRAY This is the foundation for transformation because it is the way to a close and growing relationship with Jesus.

STUDY Immersion in the Word opens the disciple to the work of the Spirit through the Word — a work that offers direction and challenge for the disciple's way.

WORSHIP Every disciple seeks to be nurtured through regular encounters with God. Worship happens both within the community of faith and in one's private devotional life.

INVITE Disciples live out their commitment to give away what they have received from Jesus by inviting others to come, follow, learn, and become involved in ministry.

ENCOURAGE Disciples care for one another by offering spiritual encouragement to others.

SERVE As disciples follow Jesus, they are forced out into the world to address the hurts of others with the power of God's love and compassion.

to next page

GIVE Disciples give the gifts they have received. As we give for the sake of Jesus and his Kingdom, we learn to give up one reality and embrace the reality of the Kingdom. Disciples at this point can distinguish the difference between the world view that Jesus offers and their own western, materialistic, individualistic, rational world view with all its self-seeking values, and more intentionally embrace the one Jesus offers.

How are these practices evident in your life? How have they shaped you? How have they opened you to the work of the Spirit? How can you rededicate yourself to a lifestyle and world view that comes from your relationship to Jesus?

M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- Identify those in your congregation who demonstrate their discipleship in the practices mentioned above. How can you make use of these spiritually mature disciples as mentors and teachers?
- Write a plan for yourself that emphasizes the spiritual disciplines: prayer, study, worship, service, giving, inviting and encouraging. Share your plan with others.
- List your barriers to living the life of the disciple. Share the list with one or two others. Talk about where you can find support and assistance.
- Describe the major differences between our cultural world view and a biblical or Kingdom world view? How does that difference most affect you?
- Describe your own experience with “cross bearing” and “self-denial.” In what ways has your experience with these transformed you as you have followed Jesus? How has this experience been a witness to others?
- What kind of discipleship training and support do you or could you offer in your congregation? Who would lead it and who would be willing to participate? How might you be a part of that learning and growth?

C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Pray for the spiritual growth of your congregation. Let the Holy Spirit give you a vision for what life might be like in your congregation with the majority of your people reaching this level of spiritual maturity. Sense both the excitement and the challenges of this part of Jesus’ plan of discipleship. Pray that Jesus will prepare the hearts of people in your congregation to accept this challenge.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read from Luke, Chapter 15, through Acts, Chapter 2. In these chapters, look for Jesus’ passionate concern for those who do not know him or his love. Think about the most important Good News we have as Christians to share. Briefly write down your understanding of that Good News. Try to find ways to share that Good News with others. Bring your written statements to the next session to share.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death — we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.” (p. 89) “But if we lose our lives in his service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ.” (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 91)