

session one

The invited become followers

FOCUS At its heart, discipleship is a series of relationships. The first relationship is the disciple's relationship with Jesus. The second focus is the relationship between disciples. The final relationship that must be included in any New Testament study of discipleship is the relationship of the disciples to others. Each relationship begins the same way: with an invitation and a response.

PRAYER *Lord Jesus, as we consider how you began a relationship with your first disciples, help us to remember how our relationship with you began. We thank you for counting us worthy to be your disciples today, and for placing us in this fellowship of disciples in this congregation and especially with those with whom we will share this study. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be at work opening our hearts and minds so that we might understand clearly how you made disciples and continue to make disciples today. May your Word bring us new insight and renewal. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- What is your definition of "disciple"? What does the word mean to you right now?
- What does it mean to you to say that discipleship is at heart a relationship?
- Talk about your style of forming relationships: Are you a person who offers the first word or one who waits until another person comes to you?
- How do you handle rejection when you try to approach someone to begin a relationship and they do not respond?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Luke 5: 1-11 and 27-29 aloud.*

1. Jesus had been preaching to the crowds, but the process of discipleship begins with a focus on an individual. In the first case, the focus was on Peter and in the second example, it was Matthew. *What is the significance of the fact that in each case Jesus made the approach, rather than the other way around?*
2. In his calling of Peter, Jesus first issues a command: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." *How do you think Peter received that command? Why do you think he did what Jesus commanded? In what way was this Peter's first step in becoming a disciple?*
3. Peter expresses his sense of being overwhelmed by Jesus' attention and care. But Jesus prevents Peter's retreat with an even greater invitation. "Don't be afraid, from now on you will be catching people." *What did Jesus mean by that invitation? What was the result of that invitation for Peter?*
4. Jesus called Matthew (Levi), a hated Roman tax collector. Though he was ostracized by fellow Jews, he had received power and authority from the Romans. He had financial security and protection. *Why is Matthew an unlikely candidate for an invitation?*
5. Again, Jesus approaches. "Follow me," he says. *What do you think Matthew might have thought as Jesus invited him? What did Matthew do?*

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6. Jesus did not call his disciples to come and merely observe, nor did he abandon them once a relationship was begun. He called them to walk and stay with him. *Based on your study so far, what does it mean to be called and to live as a disciple?*

7. The setting for the calling of the first disciples is one that develops over the first four chapters in the Gospel of Luke. As you examine those chapters for next week, you will discover again the amazing things that occurred prior to Jesus calling his first followers. *Watch for the following pattern as you read.*

Jesus' model for calling disciples includes:

- Focusing on individuals
- Approaching them directly
- Conversation that is sensitive to their needs
- Invitation or offer to follow
- Opportunity for obedient response
- Response of amazement and wonder that invites others into the journey

What does this pattern say about Jesus and his disciples? What does it say about your call to be a disciple?

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

Discipleship begins with Jesus calling us into a relationship with him, inviting us to be his disciples and challenging us to respond with an act of obedience.

- Jesus has offered this invitation — not to agree with an idea or set of teachings, not to join an institution or organization. Jesus invites disciples to himself. There is only one thing that attracts people. It is the one who issues the call: Jesus. Therefore, the call of Jesus is first and foremost an exclusive attachment to Jesus. *How do we as individuals and as a congregation offer that call?*

- The call to discipleship is a call to a relationship with the living Christ. The call is freely given and the response is an act of faith. Faith is described in these texts as a matter of taking, by the power of the Spirit, the first step of obedience in following Jesus. The response is the evidence of faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, *“Unless a definite step is demanded, the call vanishes into thin air and if people imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics.”* Faith is inseparable from obedience. Whenever the call is made and the response is one of obedience, the Spirit has worked faith. *What does the close connection between faith and obedience say about your faith life? What does it mean for the way the invitation is offered to others through you and through your congregation? What does it mean to you to live the “obedience of faith”?*



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:*

- Tell how you received the call from Jesus. What did that call have to do with your baptism? Your confirmation promise? What was personal about that call?
- How do you show obedience to Jesus in your life? How can others tell you are following Jesus now?
- How do we offer invitations to other people to meet Jesus?
- Talk about the difference between inviting people to join an institution and the invitation to a relationship with Jesus.
- How are new disciples called, invited, supported and assisted in their relationship with Jesus and on their journey as disciples in your congregation? What might be done to make that invitation and support more effective?

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

Those who are hearing Jesus' call to follow him for the first time might make a commitment to respond to that call through prayer and by continuing to study the Word. Members of the group might pray for and lay hands on those making that commitment and promise to be with them throughout the study. Others could share and pray for help with things in their lives that need to change as they move toward mature discipleship.

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 Luke, chapters 1-8. Note the pattern referenced on page 5 of this study guide. Think about the effect created by Jesus' presence, teaching and action. Ask for volunteers to be responsible for the opening and closing prayers for the next session.

"The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus."

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 57)

