

PART ONE

The Discipleship Guide Training Experience (Seven Sessions)

“No one should be surprised at the difficulty of faith, if there is some part of his life where he is consciously resisting or disobeying the commandment of Jesus. Is there some part of your life which you are refusing to surrender at his behest, some sinful passion, maybe, or some animosity, some hope, perhaps your ambition or your reason? ... How can you hope to enter into communion with him when at some point in your life you are running away from him?”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Session 1

Following Jesus: What is a Disciple?

Welcome and Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to open the session with prayer. This or a similar prayer may be used to begin your study.

Gracious Lord Jesus, as you invited James and John to follow you, by your Holy Spirit, enable us to hear your call this day. Grant us courage to follow where you lead, partner with other disciples on the way, and draw deep upon your promises. This, we pray, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing

Each week as we gather together in a large group, we will share some observations, insights, or gleanings from the prior week. As this is our first gathering, here are two questions to ponder and share aloud as you feel led.

1. Why did you sign up to give your time, energy, and focus to this Life-to-Life Discipleship experience?
2. What are you hoping to receive from the Lord and one another over the course of our time together?

Introduction of Session Focus

Scripture reading - Luke 5:1-11

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus calls Simon Peter in a miraculous way. They caught so many fish they needed help hauling the nets into the boat. Immediately, Simon Peter declares his unworthiness. Jesus ignores Simon Peter's statement and calls him into something bigger.

1. Name some reasons you think it is significant that Jesus calls, elevates, and invites into this journey someone whose self proclamation is “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man?”

2. What is it about Jesus that makes “sinful” Simon Peter a worthy disciple?
3. If it is Jesus that calls and is the one who qualifies the ones he calls, what excuses do you need to let go of that are barriers to your discipleship journey?

Watch the Video: “What is a Disciple?” with Pastor Scott Ness.

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9248204/video/673614662/embed>

Large Group Discussion

1. What did you find most helpful or challenging in this video teaching?
2. Reflect on the difference between “if/then” and “because/therefore” thinking as it relates to God’s working in your life.
3. In a world obsessed with leadership, what does it mean to define discipleship as “followership?”

Breakout sessions

Gather in groups of two or three to read and discuss the following Scriptures. Revisit any of the above large group discussion questions as you feel necessary.

Scripture reading - John 10:28

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

This is one place, of many, where we find the unadulterated Good News. Because of who Jesus is, what he has done, and because you are a part of The Family - nothing takes you from his nail pierced hands.

1. How is this verse lived and experienced in your life through worship and the gifts of the Sacraments?
2. Reflecting on Holy Communion, when was a time when this sacred meal stirred your heart and what were the circumstances?
3. Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus declares, "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." Share with the group ways in which you are and are not living an abundant life.

Scripture reading - Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (NRSV)

Reframing this verse in the because/therefore framework may look something like this: Because of who God is and what God has done for you, therefore live a just life, filled with loving kindness, always recognizing it is because of God's work in your life that you can live this way.

4. Why does the Lord call us to "do" justice and "love" kindness instead of "loving" justice and "doing" kindness? 21 NALC life-to-life discipleship
5. How does the because/therefore framework help you with motivation and action to live this verse in daily life?

Large Group Wrap-up

Have participants share any closing thoughts, questions, insights or observations that arose from the break out groups. Remind participants to do the daily devotions and encourage them to journal their insights and questions.

Next week: "Intentionality"

Close in prayer.

Helpful Resources

Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Following the Master: Stories of Sacramental Discipleship by Scott Ness

The Ways of the Alongsider by Bill Mowry

Devotions: Week One

Life as a disciple springs out of the relationship that Christ Jesus has invited you into through his life, death and resurrection. This relationship takes hold in Baptism and is nourished at the table and throughout your life. Also, worth noting, a disciple's life is personal, but it is never private. You, as a disciple and follower of Jesus, are part of a community that extends through time and space.

Each week through the Life-to-Life journey you will dive deeper into God's Word for your own study and reflection. Don't rush. Marinate on the Word and give space for the Holy Spirit to penetrate your heart and mind. And share your reflections. Have a conversation with others about what God is cultivating in you through your intentional time in his holy Word.

Flow of the Week

Saturdays and Sundays are days of preparation and reflection. The other five daily reflections are labeled as weekday 1-5. The flow of the week will change depending on when you meet for the large group sessions.

For example, if your group meets on Wednesday evenings, you would begin the next day (Thursday) with the daily reflection for weekday 1. Friday would be weekday 2. You would then do the reflections for Saturday and Sunday, and Monday you would do the reflection for weekday 3, Tuesday would be for weekday 4, and Wednesday would be for weekday 5.

Week Day 1

Scripture reading - 2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"

So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, "Wash, and be clean?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Focus Questions:

1. Read through the story a second time and highlight any words or phrases that stand out for you.
2. It was hard for Naaman to believe Elisha - what are some truths that God declares that are difficult to believe as well?
3. Naaman was expecting a complex solution to his struggle - God's solution was, instead, simple. Reflect on the times you have made following Jesus complex and complicated, as well as a time when following him was simple and plain.
4. What does restoration look like for you?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

List declarations that God has made about you, from the Scriptures, from hymns and songs of praise, and through other people:

Week Day 2

Scripture reading - Acts 8:26-40

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.' So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.' And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Focus Questions

Read through the Scriptures a second time and highlight any words or phrases that stand out for you.

1. What is going on in your life that connects with a word or phrase from this passage?

2. Who is your Philip - the one who sits with you and points you towards Jesus?

3. Who is your Ethiopian Eunuch - the one who you sit next to help them on their journey?

The Ethiopian Eunuch encountered Christ in Scripture and through Philip. His response was Baptism. How will this Scripture story shape the way you remember your Baptism throughout today and this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What have you thought about today in this focus area that you are longing for?

Week Day 3

Scripture reading - Ezekiel 3:1-3

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

Focus Questions

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight any words or phrases that stand out for you.
2. How does the Word nourish you for life?
3. For disciples, reflecting on the Word is similar to the digestion process - it's the way the nutrients get into your system. How has deep reflection in the Word rewarded you with insights and strength for living?
4. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What small specific step and active response can you take in the direction God's Word is leading you?

Week Day 4

Scripture reading - 1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved

by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Focus Questions

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight any words or phrases that stand out for you.
2. How have you experienced a living hope in difficult times and situations?
3. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you in the midst of a current challenge you are facing?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

Hope is cultivated as we discern God's vision, identify our current reality and determine steps to move from where we are to where we want to be. Focusing on one area of your life, reflect on God's vision for you in this realm. For instance, what is God's desire for you in regard to your financial health and future?

Week Day 5

From our Baptismal Liturgy:

In Holy Baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberates us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are born children of a fallen humanity; in the waters of Baptism we are reborn children of God and inheritors of eternal life. By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the Church which is the Body of Christ. As we live with him and with his people, we grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God. (LBW p. 121)

From our Communion Liturgy:

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father: Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign. You have filled all creation with light and life; heave and earth are full of your glory. Through Abraham you promised to bless all nations. You rescued Israel, your chosen people. Through the prophets you renewed your promise; and, at the end of all the ages, you sent your Son, who in words and deeds proclaimed your kingdom and was obedient to your will, even to giving his life. In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: take and eat; this is my body, given for you. DO this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me. For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death, until he comes. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. (LBW p. 90)

Focus Questions

1. Read through these portions of our liturgy a second time. Highlight and pay attention to the active verbs, recognizing the way that our God is the subject of those verbs.
2. Knowing that Baptism and Communion as sacraments, are incarnate grace, reflect on how these gifts to the Church call you forward in action to live your "therefore" life?
3. What goes through your mind and heart when you see a child baptized in worship?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

A huge component of Baptism is the identity that God places upon you in the storied waters. How has your baptismal identity informed the way you see yourself and the world around you? How can your baptismal identity have a greater impact on these two as well?

Saturday (before worship...preparing)

Saturdays are a day of preparation as we contemplate the coming Sabbath. Look back over the week, consider such questions as:

1. What sins will I lay before the Lord in my confession?
2. What prayers will I lift up?
3. What questions will I be seeking the answers to?
4. What burdens do I need to lay down in order to be fully open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
5. Who might I invite to journey with me?

Sunday (after worship...pondering)

Sundays are devoted to worship and reflection. We gather together as the Body of Christ to lift our praises to God and receive what only he can give us. Later, reflect on such questions as:

1. What point of the sermon or Sunday School lesson most caught my attention? What exactly touched my heart?
2. Which song, hymn or portion of liturgy most became a prayer or conversation with God?
3. How will making my confession and hearing the absolution affect how I live this week?
4. What strength or comfort did I receive as I participated in worship today?
5. What was the gospel message I heard today and who did I share it with?
6. Who did I speak with that I can remember in prayer this week?