

Come, Follow Me

A Disciple's Journey Through Lent



Adult Small-Group Discussion Guide

Come, Follow Me:

A Disciple's Journey Through Lent

Introduction to the Adult Small-Group Discussion Guide

Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of going wider and deeper. We move wider by our ministry and service. We move deeper by our study and learning. "Come, Follow Me" offers opportunity to delve into Christian discipleship by looking at significant moments at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Our foundational purpose for this study series is to help people move from thinking of themselves as church members to acting as disciples of Christ. If we think of ourselves as members, we set our Christianity as one of many options. We can think or say, "This week I'll attend worship because the choir is singing X, but I'll miss the food ministry because I'd like to watch the yodeling contest." If we think of ourselves as disciples, following Christ is our first priority in all things.

The study begins with the baptism of Jesus by John. As the gospels show the sequence of events, the next sermon in the series deals with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Then we spend two sessions with the Sermon on the Mount, looking first at the Beatitudes and the perspective given on following Jesus. Then we look at motivation for discipleship in Matthew 6:1-18. The final sermon in the series focuses on ministry and the challenges of following Jesus.

Our writers assumed that conversational groups would meet for 45 to 60 minutes. You may use the first half of each session for prayer, a review of the session and further reflection. Use the second half to examine the spiritual practice and to make connections with the ministry and mission of the congregation.

Before each group meeting, read the session objectives. Read and make notes about the sermon and background material.

Begin each session by invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Note the session takeaways in this Leader's Guide. As a leader, you will help shape the group conversation about discipleship. Remember that the conversation should focus on the ways that the group participants live as disciples of Christ.

Each session is connected with a spiritual practice. Describe and discuss the spiritual practice in the group setting by reading the material from the Leader's Guide. Some practices lend themselves to use in the session. Other practices, such as fasting, will call for conversation and an agreement to explore the practice and perhaps report later on the experience.

Remember to adapt the plan to meet the needs of your group. Years ago in a curriculum article, I described teaching as similar to playing jazz. To play jazz, three things are necessary – knowing the melody, understanding the chord structure, and being ready to improvise.

For the group conversation, substitute the lesson theme for the melody, biblical background and other material as the chord structure, and be ready still to improvise to deal with the needs and interests of your group.

Together, we travel and grow as a community of disciples of Christ.

Grace and peace to you,

The Rev. George Donigian

*Rev. Donigian is an ordained elder in the South Carolina Conference.
He is the pastor of Shiloh United Methodist Church in Piedmont.*

About Spiritual Disciplines or Practices

"Perhaps somewhere in the subterranean chambers of your life you have heard the call to deeper, fuller living. You have become weary of frothy experiences and shallow teaching. Every now and then, you have caught glimpses, hints of something more than you have known. Inwardly you long to launch out into the deep."

— Richard J. Foster ([Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth](#))

Is church attendance enough?

In the United Methodist Church, when we join the church, we vow to participate in the mission of making disciples with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Many sermons, Bible studies and other messages urge us to grow as disciples through spiritual practices. A full life calls for immersion into a Christ-like life.

How do we get there? John Wesley taught that we find Christ-likeness by following the means of grace. He further defined these as acts of mercy and acts of piety.

What exactly is meant by this phrase, "the means of grace"? Christian theology identifies the means of grace as those experiences and practices through which we come to know in a deeper way the unconditional love of God. The early church identified these practices as the sacraments of the church, prayer and good works.

Wesley agreed with the basic understanding of the means of grace, though as a Protestant he identified only two sacraments – Baptism and Holy Communion – unlike the early church's holy seven sacraments. He categorized the means of grace as acts of piety and acts of mercy. If we think of piety as loving God, then these acts of piety represent the vertical axis of our lives, while loving neighbors

Come, Follow Me

(mercy) is the horizontal axis of our lives. Putting the two together gives us a life in which the horizontal axis and the vertical axis form a cross – the cruciform life.

Wesley also spoke of these practices as valid and good for individuals and for communities – whether small groups or congregations.

The works of piety Wesley identified for individuals include reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living and sharing our faith with others.

Communal practices of piety include regular participation in worship and reception of Holy Communion, along with Christian conferencing or accountability to one another and Bible study.

Wesley further elaborated on the means of grace by including acts of mercy. Even as our acts of mercy may benefit others, through such actions we begin to see Christ in the world among our sisters and brothers.

Wesleyan practices of mercy include doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others. These actions are beneficial for individuals and for groups. Further community or group acts of mercy include seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination, and addressing the needs of the poor. Early Methodist societies, for example, worked to end slavery.

In "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies," Wesley wrote in 1743 of the three general rules of the Methodist movement:

- "By doing no harm (and by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced)..."
- "By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power...doing good of every possible sort...by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison;"
- "By attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence."

To grow closer to God, we need to practice the various means of grace. We suggest some specific practices in this guide because they are vital in developing one's discipleship journey. Feel free to supplement this material, remembering that a disciple's journey through Lent is not complete without learning about and implementing these daily practices.

The monk Thomas Merton wrote, "Ask me not where I live and what I like to eat. Ask me what I am living for and what I think is keeping me from living fully for that." Our hope for this resource is that it will give us all the nudge we need to live more deeply as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Come, follow Jesus!

Week 1: The Baptism of Jesus

Sermon Writer: Rev. Dr. Laura Canine

Scripture: [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

Matthew 3:13-17:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (NRSV)

Key Verse:

Matthew 3:15: "But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented."

Takeaway

Baptism is a visible sign of the invisible grace of God that leads us to salvation. We are committed to following Jesus, and we move on the road to holiness. In baptism, we celebrate the love, forgiveness and grace of Jesus. We celebrate living into the promised covenant of God.

Objectives

- Taking the congregation to the scene of Jesus' baptism at the Jordan. A crowd of people join the reader at the scene.
- Telling stories, and helping people recollect their stories of their baptism. Do you remember your baptism? Those baptized as infants don't remember that event, though photographs may show their experience. Youth and adults usually remember the experience of baptism and may be able to recall the exhilarating feeling of the water and the joy of salvation. Whether or not we have paid attention to the words of the liturgy in The UM Hymnal, we have made a pledge to be an example to those who are baptized. We have made a promise to the children and adults that we will reject sin in our lives and reaffirm our commitment to Christ so that we can live as Christian examples to those new believers in our midst. We trust that God's grace is working in our lives from before the time we're born to bring us to that point in our lives where we accept God's gift of salvation through faith in Christ.
- Teaching about baptism. This visible sign of an invisible working of grace (the classic theological definition of the sacrament) brings us to salvation and launches us on the road of holiness (both personal and social). When we are baptized, we reject sin and the power of evil, affirm and reaffirm our commitment to Christ, and commit to live as believers. We are

Come, Follow Me

baptized and recognize God's grace is sufficient. We claim God and God claims us. We strive to put God and God's kingdom first. Baptism changes us from inside out. Baptism leads to sanctification, putting off our sins and replacing our sins with Godly actions.

- Jesus was baptized so that he would know what it would be like for us to navigate our journey of salvation as disciples. Baptism is a way to fulfill all righteousness. "Jesus was baptized so that he would know what is would be like for us to navigate our journey of salvation as disciples." (see Laura Canine, Come Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey through Lent, Sermon #1)
- Have the congregation hear the words of God to understand that we are those "in whom God is pleased." In baptism we celebrate the love, forgiveness and grace of Jesus. In baptism we begin to realize that we are God's children in whom God is well pleased.

Questions for Discussion

- What is baptism?
- What does it mean to be baptized in Christ?
- What does it mean to connect us to the beauty of God's transforming love in Christ?
- What does our day-to-day living change as a result of baptism?
- How does baptism guide you on your discipleship journey?

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

Discussing the meaning of baptism also invites the group participants to reaffirm their baptisms and baptismal covenant. Begin with a community practice of reaffirming the covenant made at baptism. As Methodists, we baptize one time only. We believe that baptism is an act of God, that initiates us into the universal church. By Water and the Spirit, our theological statement concerning baptism, states that "the sacrament is to be received by an individual only once." But while we baptize only once, we reaffirm our baptisms often.

Normally reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant happens as part of a service of worship. An order for the congregational reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant has been included in The United Methodist Hymnal (1989). It focuses on God's grace extended through baptism and the response of the individual for faithful Christian living. Invite the group to extend the conversation about baptism by reading through the ritual of Holy Baptism and Reaffirmation of Faith that begins on page 33 of The Hymnal.

IMPORTANT: Be very clear that baptisms will not take place as part of this session. If an unbaptized person is participating in the group and decides that the time is right for baptism, make sure as group leader that the pastor knows of this desire and schedule the baptism as part of congregational worship.

The order of service includes a renunciation of sin and a profession of faith. You may wish to embody this portion of the service by inviting group participants to face away from the center of the room or to face the outer walls while the first question concerning the renunciation of sin is asked. Then invite the participants to turnabout to answer the questions: "Do you accept the freedom and power God give you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression..." and "Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior...".

Take time to discuss the congregation's pledge to nurture one another in the Christian faith. What are the implications of such a pledge? Join together in reading aloud this pledge.

Have a bowl of water with some pebbles or glass beads or marbles in it. Invite the participants to touch the water or to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads with the water or to take one of the pebbles or marbles as a reminder of baptism.

When all have had opportunity to touch the water, invite group participants to pray for one another and to pray together as a group the following:

May the Holy Spirit work within each of us,
That having been born through water and the Spirit,
We may live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

As group leader, you may end with a benediction or invite participants to offer praise and thanks for their baptisms and their life in Christ.

Week 2: Wilderness Temptations

Sermon Writer: Rev. Erik Grayson

Scripture: [Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Matthew 4:1-11:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him." (NRSV)

Key Verse:

Matthew 3:15: "Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! Worship the Lord God and serve only him.'"

Takeaway

In the time between the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry came time in the wilderness during which Jesus faced temptations that confirmed his identity. The temptations Jesus faced model for us fidelity and faithfulness to God.

Objectives

- Backpacking is a favorite hobby. It disconnects a person from the distractions of modern life (schedules, social media and demands of life). Wilderness is an opportunity to reflect especially on who am I in Christ.

- Why wilderness is important. Israel had many experiences in the wilderness. They all were about trials and tribulations (self-inflicted) which cut to the heart of the matter. What does it mean to be God's people?
- Jesus in the wilderness. After 40 days of fasting he was put to the test with three temptations. Each was a unique challenge to who he identified himself to be. The first, a temptation to disaffiliation with his humanity. To use divine power to overcome a human condition (hunger). The second, to take his destiny into his own hands, to attempt to manipulate God. The third, to use the easy way to take power. What daily temptations do we face that challenge our faithfulness and fidelity to God?
- During Lent we are in a time of wilderness. Lent challenges us to simplify our lives. We face challenges and temptations that effect who we follow God. Ultimately, it goes back to who we are in Jesus. How can we build up resistance to giving in to these temptations?
- The role of scripture. Jesus used scripture to rebuke the devil on each of the three temptations. Christians should know scripture. Each person should learn the word of God. What is the best way to learn scripture?
- The backpacking story. During a student backpacking exam, a violent storm threatened their lives. "Being trained before trials is an important key to withstanding whatever testing may come our way" (Eric Grayson, Come Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey through Lent). Discipleship is a journey that often goes through the wilderness. Why is it important to prepare for our discipleship journey? What are the elements of our discipleship plan?

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

John Wesley was one of many who identified reading, studying and meditating upon scripture as an important daily practice. Erik Grayson goes a step further by reminding us of the value of memorizing Bible verses. This week's spiritual practice concerns reading the scripture.

How do we read scripture? Many different books offer approaches to reading the Bible. One approach is to follow one of the several programs that take a reader through the entire Bible over a year. Some people spend time with reading Bible verses connected with a devotional guide such as "The Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide", a magazine, or "The Upper Room Disciplines", an annual book that uses the Revised Common Lectionary as the basis for daily reflection, prayer and meditation.

Another approach that might require more time is to read five Psalms and one chapter of Proverbs each day. Over the span of a month, these books of the Bible will be read. Add portions of the Gospels to these portions of scripture to complete the daily reading.

That said, what is more important than the quantity is the quality of our reading. Reading has several different purposes. Most of our reading is for informational purposes. We scan websites, magazines and newspapers, and pull out the information relevant to our situations or purposes. Some reading

becomes transformational. A passage of the Bible or even a passage from another book may change our outlooks and our lives. Transformational reading is a gift that always surprises.

A third type of reading is formational. Here our reading is a little more deliberate. We read at a slower pace and we chew intellectually or spiritually on the words so that the scripture becomes a part of us. We digest it so that the scripture shapes and forms us as disciples of Christ.

Zipping through Bible passages and marking them off an invisible chart may not be as spiritually nourishing as practicing a form of holy reading known as Lectio Divina, something that can be done as an individual and within a group. Several different approaches to Lectio are offered in a variety of resources, which are included at the end of this session. Here is a simple process:

- Read the selected Bible passage at your normal pace. Become familiar with it.
- Read the passage a second time. Read a little slower than your first reading. Pause in silence and reflect on the passage. What word or words seemed to jump out and shine for you? What word or words seemed to call for your attention? Jot those words in a journal.
- Read the passage a third time. Pause in silence for 45 seconds and reflect again on the passage. How does this passage connect with your life? Does it contain an invitation or a direction for you? Does it contain an action that you may do during the next day or so? Write that invitation or action in your journal.
- Pray in thanksgiving and ask God for wisdom and courage that you may act as directed by this movement of the Holy Spirit.

Try this approach with your group. You may invite different people to read the passage each time. Different voices bring different perspectives on scripture and may bring clarity.

If you want more information about spiritual reading of the Bible, here are five books that focus on such reading:

- "[Celebration of Discipline](#)," by Richard J. Foster
- "[Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups](#)," by Norvene Vest
- "[Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures](#)," by M. Basil Pennington
- "[Meeting God in Scripture: A Hands-On Guide to Lectio Divina](#)," by Jan Johnson
- "[Opening the Bible](#)," by Thomas Merton

Week 3: Beatitudes

Sermon Writer: Rev. Zachary Dillard

Scripture: [Matthew 5:1-16](#)

Matthew 5:1-16:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (NRSV)

Key Verse:

Matthew 5:13: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."

Takeaway

"In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls us to embody what it means to be a Christ follower." (*Zachary Dillard, Come Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey Through Lent Sermon Series*) We need a shift of mind and spirit. We can no longer think in the same old ways. Our world has shifted and changed, and while we remain faithful to Christ, these changes require our own shift in perspective. Our call to embody Jesus' teachings transforms us and the world.

Objectives

- When people-watching, we see good and bad in society. We see the very best and sometimes the worst. As we watch the world, we must identify with the broken. We are blessed in the midst of our struggles. We are blessed. We see the struggles of others. We are called to intervene on their behalf. What are ways you struggle with your Christian journey? How have you seen ways others are struggling? What can make your struggles be transformed? How can you help others who are struggling?
- We inherit what God has for us. We become what God wants when we intervene on behalf of the poor in spirit. A lack of humility seems prevalent in our society. That lack of humility is contrasted with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who taught forgiveness and lived forgiveness. Highlight the story of King's response to violence. Practicing the words of Jesus in life, King also taught followers not to return violence with violence, but to love enemies and do good to them. What are ways we can turn something evil into good? How can we intervene on behalf of the poor, the downtrodden, the helpless and the hopeless?
- Christians are called to have an impact by being salt and light to the world. "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus says. "You are the light of the world." He did not use optional language. As disciples of Christ, we season the earth with the flavor of our faith, and we reflect the light of Christ in all that we do. During this season of Lent, how can we be a reflection of Jesus to our world? What are ways we can be salt and light in our community?

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

Have you ever worked as a Volunteer in Mission? I served on a mission team in Artsakh, an area that has endured warfare for more than 20 years. We rebuilt a medical clinic and performed other work. One day, the local priest thanked us and said, "Your work is important for us. We need much help as we try to rebuild. Your work is important for Christ and his mission, but most especially your work is important for you because it will help you to see Christ."

John Wesley believed that works of mercy are a means of grace that lead to holiness and aid in sanctification. Works of mercy are, quite simply, those acts we do for others and do them without expectation of earthly reward or recognition. We do these works of mercy for others because we see and meet Christ in such service.

Consider this week an invitation to discuss and to take on a most open-ended spiritual practice: works of mercy. What are the needs of your community? Where is oppression rooted?

Works of mercy can be categorized as individual and community practices. Individual practices include doing good works, such as visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others. Participants in your group already might be engaged with some of these practices.

The wisdom of the Wesleyan movement established accountability as an important aspect of Christian discipleship. One of the places in which we see and need such accountability is in community works of mercy. Here we work together – whether as whole congregations or smaller mission groups – and seek justice. Our works of mercy are intended to end oppression and discrimination and to address the needs of the poor. In Wesley's day, for example, the Methodists worked to end slavery.

Here are some questions to help you and the participants think about community works of mercy:

- Would your group begin jail and prison visits?
- What can your group do for single parents?
- What might your group do to change governmental policies concerning hunger?
- Could you become part of the Bread for the World network or working with the Society of Saint Andrew?
- Would it be possible for a church group to establish a credit union to help the poor avoid the oppressive practices of predatory lenders?
- Are there ways that your group or congregation can work with those who struggle with addictions and to bring change to conditions that encourage such addictions?

These works of mercy fulfill our response to Jesus who said, "...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." ([Matthew 25:40, NRSV](#))

Week 4: Prayer and Attitude

Sermon Writer: Rev. Emily Sutton

Scripture: [Matthew 6:1-18](#)

Matthew 6:1-18:

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
 but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (NRSV)

Key Verse:

Matthew 6:1: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Takeaway

"During the season of fasting, prayer and giving, we do not lose focus of why we do what we do. We are seeking to put our faith into practice. Lent is not about our words or actions for others to see, but in order to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ." (*Emily Sutton, Come Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey Through Lent Sermon Series*). "We have to be aware of turning pious acts into performance. Jesus is not seeking performance. Jesus desires that we increase faith through prayer, fasting and giving in ways that point to God not ourselves." (*Sutton, page 30*) We must examine our own motives and authenticity of how we practice our faith. When we give alms, pray and fast, we are not creating a performance out of our practice, but to grow closer to God and one another.

Objectives

- Why do we do what we do? Daily we look at ourselves in a mirror. Yearly we do a physical at the doctor's office. Purpose is to do self-examination and set a course for action. Why is self-examination of our discipleship journey important?
- What is discipleship? Practicing faith in action. As we practice piety, how are we sure we are not performing? How do we keep spiritual practices private?
- Ash Wednesday illustration. When Emily placed ashes on her forehead, what was her motivation? When she later kept the ashes in place, what was her motivation? How do we practice piety publicly?
- When discipleship becomes promotion. Sin and human nature lead us to self-promotion. We can individually and corporately fall into that trap. A congregation that does excellent ministry can fall into the motivation of, "Look at us!" and evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry in terms of increased attendance or more money in the offering plate. When can truly excellent ministry become self-promotion? What is the danger? How do we keep our motivation in the right place?
- Jesus instructed his disciples to find a quiet place, shift your focus from us to God, and listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Closing questions – What motivates us? Are we living an authentic faith? How do we know?

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

The prayer of Examen is a practice of introspection and prayer that uncovers our motives and desires. It helps us discover where God is at work in, through and among us. The sermon offers suggestions and a process for use as the daily Examen, but many sources can guide you and your group in this process. See the suggestions at the end of this section.

In some ways, the rule of the Wesleyan select band created its own intense group process. Those who participated in the Wesleyan bands (no more than five people) met weekly and were asked the following questions at every meeting:

- What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
- What temptations have you met with?
- How were you delivered?
- What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
 - (John Wesley, December 25, 1738)

The Wesley approach is more intense than the Examen from Richard Foster, as suggested in the sermon materials. You may choose to supplement the teaching on the Examen from these resources:

- "[Celebration of Discipline](#)," by Richard J. Foster
- "[Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day](#)," by Father Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ
- The Upper Room offers this instruction for the Examen:
 - upperroom.org/resources/the-examen
- You also will find a number of videos on [YouTube](#) that teach different approaches to the daily examen.

Week 5: Commitment to Discipleship

Sermon Writer: Rev. Dr. Robin Dease

Scripture: [Matthew 8:14-27](#)

Matthew 8:14-27:

When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (NRSV)

Key Verse:

Matthew 8:16-17: "That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'"

Takeaway

"True discipleship means relinquishing all the ordinary things of life, home, family, job and money because what is given in exchange is priceless." (*Robin Dease, Come Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey Through Lent Sermon Series*) Jesus challenges us to follow him. Disciples begin to serve the Kingdom of God first and immediately. We do not ignore family, but we do put Jesus first. "The disciple's action reminds us that, even though we claim to follow Jesus, believe in his power to heal and hear his message, we still find it difficult to be faith-filled all the time." (Dease, p.43).

Objectives

- The difficulty of commitment today. For many people today, the most important and perhaps only commitment is to self. We act as if we are committed but we are not. We want the benefits of a relationship but not the responsibility. When bumps come along the road, we give

up. Commitment is hard. It requires dedication, devotion and allegiance. It is related to our lack of commitment to God. How can we teach commitment? What are ways to witness to our commitment to God's ministry?

- The value of commitment. Authentic discipleship requires examining our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Commitment gives us identity, which should not be confused with activity. Why is it valuable to be committed to Christ? How does it make a difference in your life?
- What commitment to Christ means. Commitment to be a disciple of Jesus is not conditional. It calls for a wholehearted response to God's call for us. The young man was more committed to family than to the higher calling of following Jesus. Commitment means following Jesus even through hard times. It means trusting Jesus even in crisis. The disciples heard and witnessed everything Jesus had done, but with the rising of a sea storm, their faith disappeared. What does commitment to Christ mean in your daily activities? How do we sustain our journey as disciples even in tough times?
- Commitment to becoming a faithful disciple. Discipleship goes beyond obedience. It requires examining our motives, examining our ways. It means seeking God in new ways, hoping God will reveal Godself fully. It requires reading, studying and praying the scripture individually and corporately. It means allowing the message of Christ to come alive in you. Christ is calling us to follow, to grow in our relationship with him and others. What is one thing you can do to grow as a disciple of Christ? What spiritual discipline seems meaningful for you to practice? In what act(s) of mercy would you find meaning?

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

As you began this study with the reaffirmation of baptismal vows by group participants, close the study with a brief service of intercessory prayer for healing and anointing with oil. [The United Methodist Book of Worship](#) includes two orders of worship of healing services – "[A Service of Healing I](#)" and "[A Service of Healing II](#)" – as well as a number of prayers for specific purposes (see Section VIII). [The Upper Room Worshipbook](#) also includes a liturgy for night prayer with prayers for healing. Please choose to use one of these services with your group.

Before joining in the prayers for healing, take time to talk about healing with the group. Our understanding of healing is based on the love of God in Jesus Christ, and the healing comes in God's time – not whenever we demand healing.

In "[Anchoring Your Well Being](#)", Howard Clinebell wrote about healing in seven dimensions of life: spiritual, physical, mental-emotional, relationships, work and play, crisis and loss, and the environment or the earth.

Healing in our lives takes many forms. Some healing, like that of Peter's mother-in-law, concerns the body. Other healing, like that of the demoniac, involves both mind and spirit. Still other healing brings

the light of God's love to matters that need forgiveness and reconciliation. The word healing, in its Greek root, is related to salvation. Both salvation and healing point to the wholeness of God's love in body, mind, spirit, and relationships within ourselves and with others. Such healing ministry was a large part of the early outreach by the church.

While we pray for healing – whether for ourselves, our families and friends, the nations or the earth – we also understand that healing does not magically remove sorrow or suffering. God never promises that we would be spared from suffering or pain. God does promise to journey with us in and through the suffering, and we can trust that God's love will sustain us in grace.

The services of healing all have various instructions or rubrics. Follow these directions, but adapt the service to fit the needs of your group's time together.

The service of healing calls for laying on of hands and anointing with oil. Oil for anointing can be purchased online from religious supply houses. You will use only a small amount of this sweet-smelling oil. When praying for someone, use the oil to make the sign of the cross on the forehead and then rest a hand on the person's shoulder or back or where the recipient deems appropriate as you pray for that person. Others in the group may join in laying on hands during this prayer.

Postscript

Thank you for being a leader and a participant in this study during the season of Lent. May Christ bless you with a deeper sense of calling and commitment as a disciple. Together, may we remember that as disciples of Christ we are called by Christ to seek the transformation of the world.

Come, Follow Me



This "Come, Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey Through Lent" Adult Small-Group Discussion Guide was developed and written by a team from the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

It is intended for use with the "Come, Follow Me: A Disciple's Journey Through Lent" Sermon Series, also produced by the South Carolina Conference.

We extend our appreciation to all involved for their work.