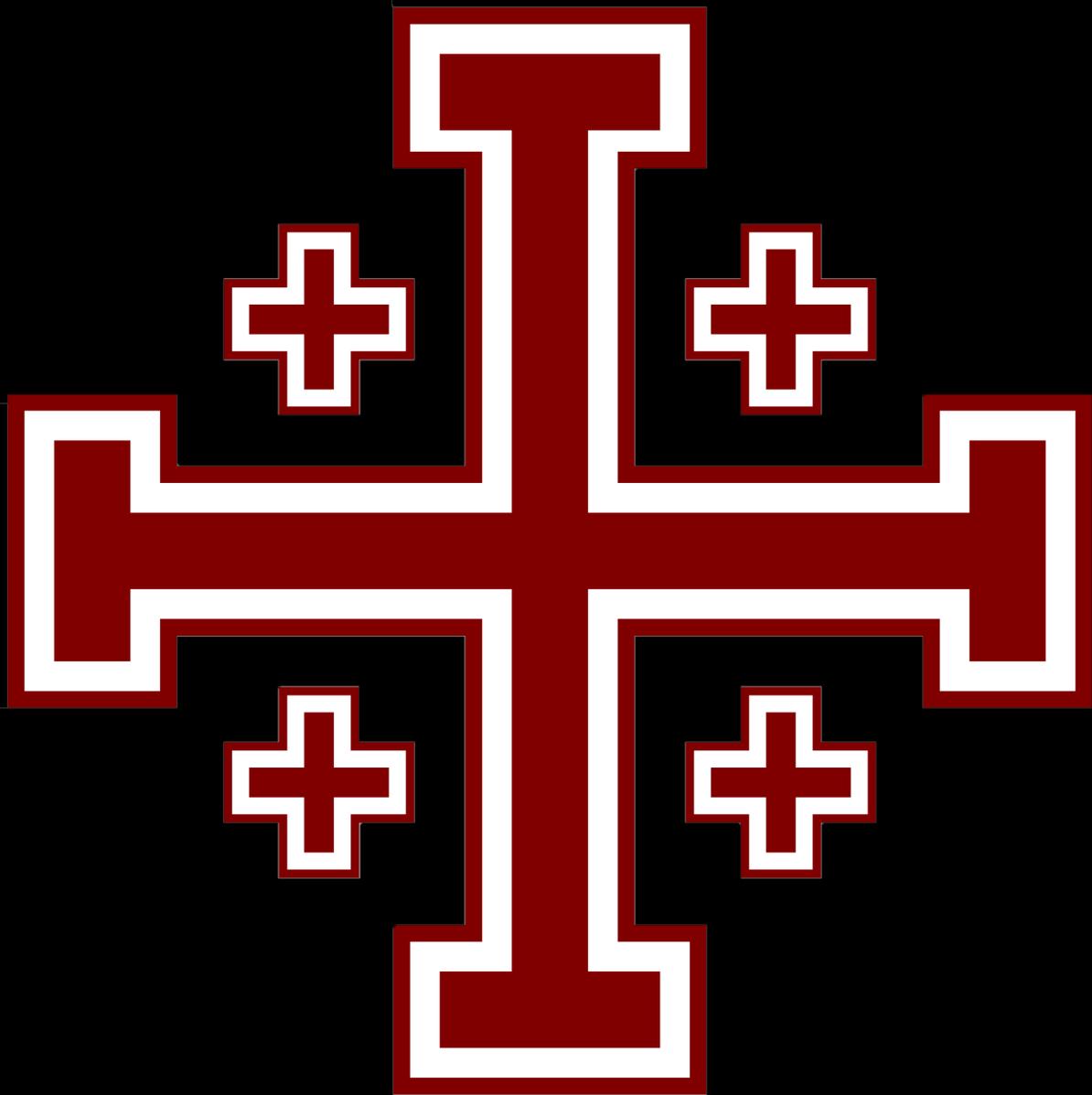


Come, Follow Me

Disciples Love and Care for Others



Discussion Guide



Come, Follow Me:

Disciples Love and Care for Others

A project of the
South Carolina Conference of
The United Methodist Church

Introduction to the Adult Discussion Guide

“Come, Follow Me: Disciples Love and Care for Others” is an eight-sermon series that examines dimensions of discipleship – in particular what it means to love neighbor. The series begins with the invitation from Jesus to follow him.

This supplement offers guidance for adults in small groups. We hope that participants in adult small-group session will have heard or experienced the sermons during worship, whether online or in-person or in written form.

Throughout the series, we emphasize the ministry of all disciples. As background for the group, print copies of Steve Manskar’s blog “[No Holiness But Social Holiness](#)” and distribute it to the group. If you are meeting via Zoom or other online platform, share the link. Ask the group to read this article as background for the series. You may wish to talk about John Wesley’s understanding of Christian discipleship. You may also wish to learn more about Covenant Discipleship groups.

We suggest the following general pattern for small groups:

- Welcome everyone and begin with a prayer for trust and learning. (3-5 minutes)
- Review the sermon. (3-5 minutes)
- Teaching/discussing the concepts (20-30 minutes)
 - Ask if anything in the sermon seemed new or different.
 - Invite the participants to raise questions that they had about the sermon.
 - Use the discussion questions for deeper conversation.
- Each learning session includes a spiritual practice. Teach and discuss this spiritual discipline. (10-20 minutes)
- Invite group to name what they learned. (5 minutes)
- End the session with prayer. Group members may wish to name prayer concerns prior to this prayer. (5-10 minutes)



Session 1: Called a Disciple

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1 | Mark 1:16-28

Key Verse

"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.'" – Mark 1:17

Takeaway

- Following Jesus is a journey of faith in community in which disciples care for one another.

Questions for Discussion

- At Jesus' call, the disciples immediately dropped their nets and followed him. What "nets" are you holding on to that make it difficult to follow Jesus?
- Do you remember answering Jesus' call to discipleship? How has saying "yes" to Jesus shaped and formed your life?
- How do you understand John Wesley's statement that there is no personal holiness apart from social holiness?
- Where do you see the powers of evil, injustice and oppression presenting themselves in your community? How can you, your small group, or your church work to resist them?
- How are you answering Jesus' invitation to a deeper relationship with him?

Discipleship Practice

- Pray the news. Look at a newspaper or a variety of news feeds and pray for the people, conditions and situations that you read or hear about.



Session 2: New Thinking

Scripture: Isaiah 54:2-4 | Matthew 5:38-42

Key Verse

*"You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer."* – Matthew 5:38

Takeaway

- From the earliest of times, God's people were called to be different. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins to teach his disciples how their lives will be changed. In order to change their hearts and their actions, he begins to reset their way of thinking.

Questions for Discussion

- Can you recall a time when two individuals had the same experience but came to entirely different conclusions? What do you think led them to two different ways of seeing things?
- What are some of the spoken and unspoken codes that affect your life? Who told you, "That's how we do it around here?" Who told you what to believe about people different from you? Do your personal codes help you be a follower of Christ or hinder you? To use the image from Isaiah 54:2-4, do the codes you live by "enlarge the site of your tent" so that you might include others? Do they stretch or strengthen you?
- Describe a time when your values or dreams for the world bumped up against someone else who had very different values or their dreams for the world were very different. What was the outcome? If you were able to resolve those differences, what made it possible?
- Choose a news story from today's headlines. How does it compare to Kingdom of Heaven ethics? What can Jesus' followers do to help make sense of that situation? How can Jesus' followers create meaning? What can you do differently to change the story to make a different world?
- As you consider the United States, three main "codes" seem in operation. One operates out of a sense of personal responsibility and taking care of "me and mine." Another approach values usefulness, and decisions are based on what is helpful or productive. A third code values the community above the needs of the individual. What are the benefits and problems in each of these ways of thinking? How do they differ from Kingdom of Heaven ethics? In other words, how would Jesus respond to each with, "But I say to you..."?
- One approach to Matthew 5:38-42 is to understand Jesus' teaching his disciples to give sacrificially even beyond what is expected, even when it comes at a personal high price. Where do you need to set aside your own personal desires on behalf of another?



Discipleship Practice

- Reframing or restating questions or problems often gives fresh perspective and solutions that surprise us. Each day, look at challenges in your life and ask the question, “What if . . .?” For example:
 - What if you are able to do what you are afraid to try? Even if you couldn’t do it perfectly at first, what becomes possible in the future?
 - What if you only worked four days a week?
 - What if you allowed the other person to share their feelings without interrupting? Without judging? What do you think you would learn if you asked, “Tell me how you came to believe/feel/think that?” – and you actually listened to discover the answer?



Session 3: New Way

Scripture: Isaiah 55:3-9 | Matthew 5:43-48

Key Verse

"So that you may become sons of your Father in heaven, because he makes his sun rise on evil and good and makes it rain on righteous and unrighteous." – Isaiah 64:8

Takeaways

- Jesus really does mean love your enemies. He wants us to love people without exception.
- Loving our enemies is a core Christian practice that we do for its own sake, without expecting a reward or a change.
- Loving our enemies teaches us how to love ourselves, our neighbors, and even how to love God/like God.
- We love by giving extravagant care and hospitality.

Questions for Discussion

- Who is your "enemy"?
- Talk about a time when you showed love to an enemy – someone different from you, someone you dislike, someone who treated you poorly.
- How did that experience resemble God's making his sun rise on evil and good and making it rain on righteous and unrighteous?
- Have you ever met someone who exceptionally practiced Jesus' command from this verse? Describe them and what they did.
- What are some opportunities for you to practice loving your enemy? Are there places/ways where you can better get to know someone you are in conflict with? Are there places/ways you can meet and get to know someone different from you?
- Who is your enemy? (Repeated for reconsideration at end of session)

Discipleship Practice

- This week, take time to practice loving your enemies in prayer. Every time you pray, lift them up by name. Picture their faces and try to see them as God sees them. Pray for their wellbeing. Ask God to give you an opportunity to care for them. Ask God to help you love them without expecting a reward or without expecting them to change. Finally, ask God to help bring you to mutual reconciliation and friendship, and then wait in silence for at least five minutes. While the silence passes, simply listen to your breathing. Await the movement of the Holy Spirit. Give God thanks for this moment and conclude your prayer as you normally would.



Session 4: New Actions

Scripture: Amos 5:14-15 | Luke 10:35-47

Key Verses

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” – Luke 10:36-37

Takeaway

- To have compassion even when our differences make it difficult. To love all people even when ideologies clash. To serve without caring about the status, belief or politics of the other.

Questions for Discussion

- Jesus defines a neighbor as someone who is willing to love and offer compassion to anyone in need, regardless of who they are or where they are from. What is the biggest challenge with his definition? How does this parable challenge you?
- Who are the “Samaritans” of our time? Who are those who are marginalized or disenfranchised or who are those who marginalize and disenfranchise us?
- What are the consequences of not seeing all people as your neighbor? What are the benefits?
- How do you overcome rage, hate, prejudice or apathy in order to have love, compassion and grace for all people?
- What are some specific things you can do to tear down the walls that divide us and build tables to unite us?

Discipleship Practice

A T-shirt is imprinted with this message:

Love thy neighbor.
Thy homeless neighbor.
Thy Muslim neighbor.
Thy Black neighbor.
Thy gay neighbor.
Thy immigrant neighbor.
Thy Jewish neighbor.
Thy Christian neighbor.
Thy atheist neighbor.
Thy addicted neighbor.

- Which neighbor on this list is easy to love?
 - Which neighbor is most difficult to love?
- Why is it difficult to see them as your neighbor?

Spend some time and reflect on these modern-day Samaritans. Then find ways to serve them. Volunteer at a shelter, donate to a place that houses runaway teens, read about organizations that are building bridges with Muslim communities and see how you can help. Learn about groups that are working to end systematic racism, poverty or hate.

Let your prayers become actions.



Session 5: The Way of Justice

Scripture: Micah 4:1-4 | 1 Peter 3:8-12

Key Verse

"He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." – Micah 4:3

Takeaway

- God's vision for the world is one of peace. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be peacemakers in a world that is not peaceful.

Questions for Discussion

- Remembering Micah's use of the vine and fig tree as an image of home and peace, where is your vine and fig tree? A place that you feel at peace?
- What are you afraid of, or what makes you afraid?
- What sources of meaning do people exalt above the Lord? What sources of meaning do you exalt above the Lord?
- How can you better listen to the teaching of the Lord?
- Can nations beat their swords into plowshares? What is one concrete way?
- How can you "study war no more" and start spreading peace within your family, workplace, church and community?

Discipleship Practice

An exercise in empathy leading to advocacy:

Choose a group of people to which you do not belong. Take 15 minutes to put yourself in the shoes of a member of that community. How do they feel? What makes them afraid? What could change in the world that would enable them to be able to sit under their own vine and fig tree? Try to come up with one tangible, actionable example that would improve their life.

Take your newfound understanding and advocate for a positive change. Write an email to your representative to encourage them to join you in peacemaking.

ONE STEP FARTHER: Replace empathy with listening. Empathy is passive, and you may not have all the necessary information. Find the person with whom you did the empathy exercise. Sit with that person and ask them what would make their world a more peaceful place. Take time to ask other questions for clarification, but not for argument. Believe what you are told, and join them in the work they are already doing.



Session 6: The Way of Love

Scripture: Isaiah 64:17-25 | 1 John 3:11-24

Key Verse

"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" – 1 John 3:17

Takeaway

- God's love, defined by Jesus' death on the cross, moves disciples to respond to the needs of another and to acknowledge that "the other" offers the gift of opportunity to serve.

Questions for Discussion

- In what ways have you received God's love from someone else? What resulted from someone meeting a need you had in my life?
- In what ways have you offered God's love to someone in need? What resulted from meeting that need? What did you realize after that act of service?
- How might someone who has dementia share in the work of discipleship? What can the church do to empower people with dementia to share in the work of discipleship?
- What might God's love be calling you to do or to be for someone else?
- What is your understanding of your relationship with other human beings? With the creation? With God? How important is it to connect and be in relationship with those in need?

Discipleship Practice

Journaling is a spiritual practice in which we write about our faith, our connection with God, our ministry with others, our hopes, our questions and more. Many books describe journaling. Some of these are "[Journaling: A Spiritual Journey](#)," by Anne Broyles, and "[Journaling as a Spiritual Practice](#)," by Helen Cepero. Here is a short article about [getting started in journaling](#).

Take time each day this week to write a brief response to these questions:

- Where did I receive God's love today?
- Where did I offer God's love today?

You may discover that keeping a journal is helpful to your life as a disciple.



Session 7: Called to Account

Scripture: Isaiah 10:1-4 | James 2:14-25

Key Verse

"What will you do on the day of reckoning?" – Isaiah 10:3

Takeaways

- A renewed, expanded understanding of judgment and its role in the life of a disciple.
- The extent to which God loves justice and punishes God's people for injustice.
- An awareness of injustice.
- Recognition that we are already judged, and that repentance and action are appropriate responses.

Questions for Discussion

- Must we personally experience injustice in order to be concerned or take action in some way?
- Novelist James Baldwin once said: "If one really wishes to know justice in a country, one does not question the policeman, the lawyers, the judges or the protected middle class. One goes to the unprotected – those precisely who need the law's protection most – and listen to their testimony." How might we listen to their testimony? How do the poor and ethnic minorities experience the law where you live?
- What injustice breaks your heart?

Discipleship Practice

What news stories demanded your attention during the last week? Where did you see injustice in those stories? Where are you seeing injustice in your community now? What can your church do to address that injustice? How will you work with others to address the injustice?



Session 8: Disciples Care for Others

Scripture: Micah 6:6-8 | James 1:9-27

Key Verse

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." – Micah 6:8*

Takeaway

- God is pleased when we are in a faithful relationship with God and a committed relationship with our neighbor.

Questions for Discussion

- Act justly – Have I “done right” by people by treating others as they should be treated? Why or why not?
- Love mercy – Do I see my material blessings as a means to bless others? (share examples). Do I give of myself only when it is convenient? Why or why not?
- Walk humbly – Do I make decisions based more on how they will benefit me, or how they will benefit God’s kingdom?

Discipleship Practice

There are as many ways to pray as there are people. We pray in silence and we use words when we are alone. When we gather with others, we pray with words and with silence. We may pray with sign language and with interpretive movement. We may pray in a call-and-response pattern or with a more formal liturgy. Bishop Rueben Job offers many ways of prayer in his [“A Guide to Prayer.”](#) Richard Foster offers practices in [“Celebration of Discipline.”](#) All of these practices help us to grow as disciples in love with God and in love with all people.

*Gracious Lord, we are grateful that you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.
Your promises of love never end. We ask you to renew our hearts and minds in you.
Fill us with reflections of your character. Help us to extend mercy, to show love, to
walk humbly, and to act in ways that are just and right in this world. May we tune out
the many voices around us and strive to hear you first. We ask that you unite your
people throughout the world, that we would set aside our differences and focus
on the bond in you that holds us together. Renew within us your steadfast love.
In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*



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This “Come, Follow Me: Disciples Love and Care for Others” Adult 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: Disciples Love and Care for Others” Sermon Series, also produced by the South Carolina Conference.

We extend our appreciation to all involved for their work.

Both the Sermon Series and the Adult Discussion Guide – as well as previous “Come, Follow Me” series – can be downloaded at

umcsc.org/comefollowme.

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