

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

Ps. 62:5–12

1 Cor. 7:29–31

Mark 1:14–20

Follow the Leader

**Goal for
the Session**

Hearing Jesus' call to follow him, adults will visualize and describe what it means to be Jesus' disciples today.

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

Focus on Mark 1:14–20

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Leslie J. Hoppe

Jesus and the four disciples are active agents in leading people to experience the presence of the kingdom of God. The disciples, in particular, are not passive recipients of God's favor. Jesus called them in order that they might join him in proclaiming the coming of God's reign on earth. Like Jesus, the disciples will experience opposition that will eventually claim their lives (see 13:3–13). But the end of Mark's Gospel shows that death's victory over Jesus—and therefore over the disciples—is only temporary. God raised Jesus from the dead and God will raise the disciples as well.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Lee Barrett

John Calvin helped popularize this passage as a paradigm of the calling of all Christians. We the readers, in whatever culture or century, are they. According to Calvin, God called “rough mechanics” like Simon, Andrew, James, and John in order to show that none of us are called by virtue of his or her own talents or excellences. Like those disciples who misunderstood and failed Jesus at every turn, we too are sinners in need of forgiveness for our multiple betrayals. Like them, we sinners, despite our failings, are slowly being transmuted into followers of Christ. Like them we are called not to the enjoyment of a private salvation but to a public vocation. Just as it did for the disciples, the command “Follow me” points to the way of the cross for us. Just as it did for the disciples, the ominous reference to the arrest of John the Baptist warns that we too are called to a life of risk, insecurity, and self-abnegation.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Elton W. Brown

Along those lines, we have here another case of instant decisions for Christ: Simon, Andrew, James, and John drop everything and become disciples, just like that, “immediately.” But, again, this is not the end of the story. This is just the beginning of “the beginning” (v. 1). Ahead, for them and for us, there is much to learn, much stumbling, misunderstanding, and backsliding. Becoming a faithful Christian disciple takes both a moment and a lifetime.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Ted A. Smith

And he calls people to respond. Because the time is fulfilled, Jesus calls us to “repent, and believe in the good news” (v. 15). And because the kingdom of God has drawn near, Jesus calls disciples to follow him and be made into fishers for people (v. 17). These are not all-purpose ethical imperatives, always in season, but responses to the fullness of time made present in Jesus Christ. Repenting, believing, following, fishing—these are actions that keep time with this great tempo change in the music of redemption.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:14–20

Focus on Your Teaching

Most of your participants probably consider themselves disciples of Christ. They have said yes to Jesus' invitation to follow him, and coming to class is part of this journey. Here, they learn about Jesus and how to follow him in their daily lives. Like the original disciples, your adults vary in life situations and specific faith beliefs. Some may use more traditional faith language in conversation while others may focus more on walking the walk of serving others. Today's story of Jesus' call to the first four disciples provides an opportunity to reflect on their response to this invitation and where they are in their Christian journey.

Dear God, help me lead this session in a way that helps others grow in their relationship to you. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens
- paper
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 31, 2021

For Responding

- option 1: pens, paper
- option 2: poster board, old magazines and newspapers, scissors, glue
- option 3: pens, paper

In Jesus' time, it was common for students to seek out teachers and ask to be their disciples. It is significant that Jesus changed this. He sought out his disciples and they responded to his invitation.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome the participants and introduce any visitors. Form pairs and have participants think of a time they were chosen for something or invited to an event when they least expected it. Perhaps they were offered a job they didn't request, asked to be on a board or team, or invited to an event by a friend. Have each person briefly tell his or her partner what happened and then answer the following questions:

- ✪ Why were you surprised?
- ✪ Why did you think you were selected?
- ✪ How did you respond?

After a few minutes, call the whole group together and allow a few volunteers to tell their answers to the large group. Close the activity by telling the group that today's session is about Jesus' selection of the disciples.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O Loving Teacher, your words can be comforting, encouraging, challenging, and frightening. Open our ears that we may hear clearly what you say to us and open our hearts to respond. Amen.

EXPLORING

Before reading the focus scripture tell participants that each of the four Gospels includes the story of Jesus selecting his disciples. They will soon read each version, including the version in Mark, today's focus scripture, but first ask people what they remember about the selection of the disciples.

- ✪ What happened?
- ✪ Who were they?
- ✪ What kind of people were they?

Distribute Bibles to anyone who does not have one and have a volunteer read Mark 1:14–20.

Remain as a large group and have three other volunteers read the versions in the other Gospels. They are Matthew 4:18–22, Luke 5:1–11, and John 1:35–51. After each reading, invite participants to call out any differences they see among the versions. Due to the brevity of Mark’s Gospel, some readers may think that the disciples responded to Jesus’ invitation to follow him in their first meeting. Tell participants that most scholars believe it is more likely that Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John had heard Jesus’ teaching and observed some miracles.

Form pairs or groups of four and invite them to pretend they are one of the four disciples called by Jesus. Have them respond to these questions based on what they know:

- ✧ Why would you follow him rather than just listen to him as the rest of the crowd does?
- ✧ What might this require of you?
- ✧ What questions do you have about this relationship?

After a few minutes, return as a large group and invite each group to summarize the main points of their discussion.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 1:14–20). Invite a participant to read the “What?” excerpt aloud. Then have everyone silently read the “Where?” excerpt. Ask:

- ✧ What does this add to your understanding of this passage?

Give participants paper and pens and have them pretend they are James and John, writing their father, Zebedee, a few months after leaving him to follow Jesus. Have them write what they are learning from Jesus and what they are thinking in a brief letter. After five minutes, ask volunteers to read what they wrote.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Once and Every Day). Return to the pairs or groups of four and have them read the resource sheet silently. Instruct them to look up the Scripture passages and answer the question. Bring the participants back together and invite a few to tell what characteristics they listed.

Have a volunteer read the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. As a transition to Responding, discuss as a group how your church community helps people make the initial decision to follow Christ and also supports disciples for a lifetime of learning, stumbling, misunderstanding, and backsliding.

EASY
PREP

The Cost of Discipleship
by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
is a classic resource for
participants who want
to learn more about
Christian discipleship.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. In a Few Words** Christian discipleship is multifaceted. It is a big concept and sometimes difficult to put into words, but that is what you are going to ask the participants to do. Distribute pens and paper. Instruct the participants to take a few moments to reflect on what they have discovered about discipleship and then have them write their own definition of discipleship in twenty-five words or less. When all have completed their assignment, have them condense their paragraph to a tweet. Encourage them to place their definition in a prominent place as a reminder.
- 2. Pictures of Discipleship** Participants will choose images of discipleship that might challenge them to action. Place the poster board, magazines, newspapers, scissors, and glue on a large workspace where the participants will have easy access to them. Instruct the participants to scour the magazines and newspapers for images of disciples in action. Have them cut out the pictures and arrange and glue them on the poster board. Display these images at future sessions for continued reflection on discipleship. Spend a few minutes as a group looking at the collage. Invite each person to tell which picture is most meaningful or challenging to them. Have them name one aspect of discipleship they would like to nurture in their own lives. Encourage them to pray about this during the week.
- 3. Always Learning and Growing** Discipleship is synonymous with “life of faith” and “Christian walk.” Distribute paper and pens. Invite participants to draw an image of their lives as disciples. They may wish to draw a path from their baptism or the moment they chose to follow Christ to the current day. Encourage them to list obstacles, joys, important people in their faith life, and so on. After a few minutes, form pairs to discuss their drawings and lives of discipleship. Have them help each other to list two or three actions they can take to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. If appropriate, encourage the participants to exchange contact information so they can encourage each other.

CLOSING

Invite participants to identify a discovery they will take home with them from today's session. Instead of praying a pre-written prayer or litany, ask if anyone has a need for which he or she would like prayer. You may want to write requests on a piece of paper. When the list has been compiled, ask the group to join hands and lead them in prayer. When you have prayed for all of the needs, close the session by leading the group in the Lord's Prayer.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 31, 2021, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session. You may also want to e-mail the list of prayer needs to the participants so they can pray for them throughout the week.

Focus on Mark 1:14–20

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Jesus and the four disciples are active agents in leading people to experience the presence of the kingdom of God. The disciples, in particular, are not passive recipients of God’s favor. Jesus called them in order that they might join him in proclaiming the coming of God’s reign on earth. Like Jesus, the disciples will experience opposition that will eventually claim their lives (see 13:3–13). But the end of Mark’s Gospel shows that death’s victory over Jesus—and therefore over the disciples—is only temporary. God raised Jesus from the dead and God will raise the disciples as well.

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Once and Every Day

fidelity · service · sacrifice

In Mark’s Gospel we see how this early decision needs to be reaffirmed and even corrected time and again. At Caesarea Philippi, Simon affirms his faith in Jesus, but not his faith in Jesus as the suffering Messiah—that will take a lifetime (8:27–33). On the mount of transfiguration Peter knows how good it is to be with Jesus but forgets that the real task is to follow Jesus—for a lifetime (9:2–8). In the courtyard, warming himself before the fire, Peter threatens to give up a lifetime of fidelity for a moment of fear (14:66–72). At the very end, when Jesus is on the cross, Peter, Andrew, James, and John are nowhere to be found. Even then God does not count that moment as the final word: now Jesus will go before them—for a lifetime (15:40–41; 16:7–8). Some of our churches so stress the moment of decision for Jesus that we fail to nurture the longstanding commitment. Decision is to be lived out in fidelity, service, even sacrifice. Some of our churches are so good at nurturing that we forget that even “cradle Christians” sometimes need to decide for fidelity, service, even sacrifice. Christianity is always both for now and for the long haul; both a moment and a lifetime.¹

Look up the following passages that talk about being a follower or disciple of Jesus: Mark 8:34–38; Luke 9:57–62; Luke 14:26–27.

✦ What characteristics are part of being a disciple of Jesus?

1. Elton W. Brown, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 284, 286.