

# Grow to Go! Disciples on a Mission

## Bible Study Introduction

Have you ever done a Bible study that encouraged you to rent a goofball comedy before you get started? Well, you're about to.

Will Ferrell is an actor known for making good-hearted comedies about flawed characters who learn enough life lessons to help them grow up in the end. In the movie, *Talladega Nights* (2006, PG-13), Ferrell plays a NASCAR driver named Ricky Bobby (yes, he has two first names!). Mid-flick, Ricky Bobby says a hysterical table grace addressed to "Baby Jesus." Exasperated, his wife chides him, arguing that praying to a baby is "a bit weird and all, don't ya think?" Unaffected, Ricky keeps right on praying to the cute, cuddly, little golden-fleece-diapered, 7 pounds 8 ounces, Christmas Jesus...because that's the one he likes best. Everybody else around this wacky dinner table takes this as a cue to describe how they like to imagine Jesus. The Ninja Jesus, fighting off evil doers, isn't even the most outrageous one. This scene is hilarious!

But after you stop laughing, ask yourself this question: Who is Will Ferrell, ever so gently, poking fun at??

The answer, of course, is that he is laughing at **us** whenever we treat Jesus like *Silly Putty* and act like we can give him any shape we want. He is laughing at us whenever we try to control, manipulate, shrink, squeeze, or box Jesus in. And we laugh, too, because we know it's true. We do try to do these things. As much as we might try to be like Albert Schweitzer (see p. 16), we all carry a little Ricky Bobby inside of us. Albert would probably tell us that he did, too. After all, Jesus can be scary! He claims Lordship over our work, relationships, and money. He tells us we should love our enemies. He is God from God

and light from light. Through him, all things were made! We know how foolish it is to think we can build a box that could keep Jesus in it...even a church-shaped box. And so we can't help but laugh when we see a little bit of ourselves in Ricky Bobby.

The truth is, Jesus can't be kept inside any box we could dream up. Jesus was sent by God to announce and to bring in the transformation of the whole world, a world that God so loves. The world is the point of Jesus' ministry. Jesus isn't "in" the church for MY sake; Jesus is at work through the church (in other words, through you and me!), for the sake of the world.

## That's worthy of repetition!

- Jesus isn't "in" the church for **my** sake.
- Jesus is at work "through" **us** (individually and together, as the church)...for the sake of the world.

## The goal of this Christian education planner is to equip you to help people in your congregation:

- wrestle with these ideas
- see that God is up to something much bigger than taking care of "my" needs
- understand that, in fact, the point of God's mission is to save and bless the whole world
- hear Jesus' call to follow him out into the world that God so loves
- embrace their call to be disciples right in the middle of their everyday lives.

In other words, it'll help straighten out the little bit of Ricky Bobby we all carry around inside of us.





# Leader Bible Study

## For God So Loved The World!

John 3:16

### Theme:

This Bible study searches the opening and closing scenes in Jesus' ministry, according to Matthew's Gospel, looking for clues about what in the world God is up to in and through the lives of those who follow Jesus.

### Purpose:

The goal of this Bible study is to feed the spirits—and the minds—of congregationally-based Christian Education leaders. It invites teachers and leaders to reconnect with the God who is at work in and through them, making a difference in the lives of people in their congregation, for the sake of God's mission in the world. It will help teachers, and leaders think about and more fully embrace what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ in their own lives, so that they can help others think about and more fully embrace this in their lives, too.

### Key ideas:

- The opening and closing scenes in Jesus' ministry, according to Matthew's Gospel, offer key insights into God's loving mission in the world...and our role within it.
- The story about what Jesus said and did at the very beginning and at the very end of his ministry on earth shows us that:
  - God is not a "temple God" but is, rather, at work in and through history for the sake of the whole creation
  - God's kingdom has broken into and is breaking into the world, bringing light & life, and making everything new
  - God works through those who have been called by Jesus to share the good news of the kingdom with everyone

- God meets us as we do the work we are called to do in the world
- God works through people to bring in the kingdom and, in the end, it is God who will make it happen

### Diving into the Word:

As every credible contestant on American Idol knows, the beginning and the ending of a performance carry special significance. It's not that the middle doesn't matter, but people remember that first awesome—or awful—note...and the last one. It's the same for authors. The way an author begins and ends a story has special significance. The start and finish of a narrative frames the whole rest of the story and provides the context for everything that comes in between. In this Bible study, we're going to explore the "beginning" and the "ending" of the story of Jesus' public ministry, at least the way Matthew tells it, to see what we can learn about God, about our world, and about ourselves.

### This Bible study contains three main sections:

- The world is where the action is
- Jesus calls us to follow him to the crossroads
- Be ready for surprises along the way!

### There are a couple of options for how you do the Bible study:

- Take on all three of these sections in one long, 90–120 minute session.
- Spread the study over several weeks and take it one section at a time. This option would give you the most time to really dig in to the Bible itself and that is, after all, the heart of this study.

#### Each section includes four parts:

- 1 A discussion starter
- 2 Reading and talking about the Bible
- 3 A short reflection about the “point” of the section
- 4 A few “just wondering...” questions to bring it all home.

The whole study is meant to be self-led by the teachers and leaders in a congregationally based Christian education program. No experience – and certainly no seminary training – necessary! Ready? Let’s go.

#### The world is where the action is

##### FOR Discussion

**True or false:** We’re all tempted, at least once in awhile, to think that having a relationship with Jesus is (or should be!) like having our own personal genie, whose job it is to grant our every wish. Discuss.

##### Read

**Read Matthew 4:12-17.**

The most important thing you’ll do in this Bible study is...that’s right...actually read the Bible! God is speaking through this story and has something to say to us. What is it? After you read this passage, spend time talking about what you’re hearing. Listen to each other!

##### Reflect

**Use these three questions to get you started:**

- What is God doing in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

Back in Jesus’ day, people had all kinds of ideas about who the “Messiah” would be and what he would do when God finally sent him. They had a whole long list of things they wanted him to take care of. Old scores they wanted him to settle. Enemies they wanted him to destroy. Blessings they wanted him to bestow. In other words, they thought God was sending a holy lump of Silly Putty that they could squeeze into whatever shape they wanted or thought they needed. But Jesus—the Lord of lords and King of kings—will not be molded by human hands or limited by our imaginations. This was clear pretty much from the moment Jesus hit town...because the town he chose wasn’t Jerusalem, the obvious choice. Unexpectedly, Jesus started his ministry in Capernaum, by the sea, a rough and tumble town right in the middle of “Galilee of the Gentiles.” It was there, not in a temple or on a sacred mountain or in a holy city, but rather standing in the crossroads of the nations, that Jesus announced, “The kingdom of heaven has come near!” Jesus didn’t come to be anybody’s wish-granting genie. Jesus came to do something beyond anything we could ever have dreamed or hoped for. Jesus came to change the world.



##### JUST Wondering...

- Have you ever been totally surprised by God? What happened?
- You may have experienced the presence of Jesus in “the temple” (i.e. at worship) before. But when have you seen Jesus “show up” out at the crossroads?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he talked about “the kingdom of heaven?” When and where has it felt “near” to you?

## Jesus calls us to follow him to the crossroads

**FOR Discussion** Fill in the blank: I can tell that a person is a good Christian because he/she always: \_\_\_\_\_.

OK, what popped into your head first? Why?

### Read Read Matthew 4:18-25.

Remember, this is the heart of the Bible study. While you're reading the story from Matthew, listen for what God is saying to you. Then, spend time listening for what God is saying to you through each other.

### Reflect Use these three questions to get you started:

- What is God doing in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

"The kingdom of heaven is near!" Jesus cried. "The world is about to change!" And then what's the first thing Matthew says he did after this big announcement? He grabbed the first couple of guys he saw and said, "Wanna help?" Through Jesus, we are reminded that God uses ordinary people like us to get things done. Notice what Jesus doesn't say to those

fishermen. He doesn't say, "Hey ya'll, come follow me to church!" or "Yo there, come follow me to a prayer meeting!" or even "'s'up dudes, wanna do some Bible study?" Instead, Jesus called his disciples to follow him into a crazy, busy life of healing and teaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom everywhere they went to whoever would listen. The fact is, when Jesus says, "Follow me," it always means action. Jesus calls us to follow him into the crossroads, right into the middle of everyday life. Disciples do get together for worship, of course, and for prayer and Bible study. But that's not the point. Disciples do those things because it equips and energizes them for the real work Jesus calls them to do in the real world. How can you tell that a person is a Christian? They're the ones serving Jesus and loving their neighbors in the middle of their crazy, busy, everyday lives.

### JUST Wondering...

- How has God been at work through you, making a difference in somebody else's life, lately? Describe it.
- Which "spiritual disciplines" energize you for your everyday ministry the most? Which ones equip you for your work as a disciple? Is there something you're missing? What will you do about that?
- How is the work you do inside the congregation (i.e. teaching or leading in the Christian education program) helping equip and energize others for their everyday ministries? What can you do to make sure that happens more intentionally?

## Be ready for surprises along the way

### FOR Discussion

Choose the letter you think best answers this question:

#### What is evangelism?

- 1 Telling people the good news about Jesus
- 2 The scariest thing you could ever imagine doing
- 3 Both of the above

### Read

Read **Matthew 28:1-20**.

When it comes to listening for what God is trying to say to us through the biblical story, everybody has something to offer. No experience is necessary!

### Reflect

Really listen to each other as you talk about these three questions.

Let yourself be surprised by what you hear...and who you hear it from.

- What is God doing in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
- What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

Did you notice how the story ends exactly where it started? The angel who is waiting for the women at the tomb tells them to dry their

eyes. Jesus is on the move! And he is headed, the angel says, for Galilee...crossroads of the nation Jesus' work continues, right in the middle of the everyday world, as it continues through us. "Go quickly and tell!" the angel says. The women, to their credit, do as they're told even though they're filled with fear. Thankfully, it doesn't take long for them to discover this wonderful truth: As we go about the work Jesus calls us to do, he shows up! "Greetings!," Jesus said to them. And they worshipped him. Right there on the roadside. It kind of makes you think that maybe our job, as Jesus' disciples, isn't to "take" Jesus to the crossroads. Jesus is already there, right?! In fact, there is no place we could go that Jesus hasn't already been. Our job is, rather, to recognize Jesus when we see him out there...and worship him. In other words, name his name! Tell people what it is we see. Surprise them with the good news that, indeed, the kingdom of heaven has come near.



### JUST Wondering...

- Where is the most surprising place you have "seen" Jesus?"
- Have you ever dared to tell someone, "You know, I think Jesus is right here with us!" (or something like that)? What happened?
- Who needs to hear a surprising word from you this week?

Written by Kelly Fryer, missiologist with nearly 20 years experience in leading congregations in renewal. She is the author of the *No Experience Necessary Bible Study Series*, *Reclaiming the L Word*, and *Reclaiming the C Word*. Watch for Kelly's latest book, *Reclaiming the E Word*, due out later this year.