

GOALS FOR THIS COURSE

Through this course and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will:

- Engage the Word (especially in Luke and Acts) as it reveals how Jesus' followers moved from being new partners to becoming maturer disciples.
- Hear and respond to Jesus' invitation to follow and to move into a commitment of growth in discipleship.
- Consider the implications of the invitation to strengthening the discipleship ministry of your congregation as it reaches out to and includes new believers.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- *Making Disciples* is the central mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus' final instruction and command in the Gospel of Matthew is "Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Every other ministry we attempt depends on our faithfulness in fulfilling this first command.
- The Gospels tell the story of Jesus "making" disciples. Through his interaction with the first disciples, he gave us the model for how people are invited to become disciples and grow in their discipleship.
- The way Jesus brought his followers into mature discipleship has several key components. Those six key components are: *Followers, Learners, Ministers, Living Examples, Witnesses, and Leaders*.

As we understand how Jesus called and led his first disciples, we can follow that journey to renew our own discipleship and use it as a model for how people are invited to grow in discipleship within our own faith communities. The goal of this study is to move us to action. Jesus has called us to "go and make disciples." The call is urgent. Jesus invites you to move forward toward maturity in your life as a disciple so that you can be all that Jesus meant you to be. As you live out your discipleship and as you work with others in your congregation, you can continue to invite others into the joyful journey of a growing relationship with Jesus.

NOTES TO THE LEADER

As leader, you play an important role in this study. You will be responsible to plan the sessions, make sure resources are available to participants, guide the discussion in order to cover the material, encourage participation by all, help summarize learning, and help to carry through on any possible actions that may arise from your study. You do not need to be a pastor or church professional to lead this study—but some previous experience in leading small group studies will be helpful.



A U D I E N C E

The course is meant to help congregational leaders and members come together to study Scripture in order to grow in their own discipleship and to look at how people grow in discipleship in your congregation. Any group of youth and/or adults in the congregation could benefit from this study. The most productive study, however, might be done by those who have responsibility for discipleship in your congregation — congregation council, education and/or evangelism committee and others.

P R E P A R A T I O N

- Be sure you make a copy of this guide for each participant. Making these available before your first session and encouraging all to read through the guide ahead of time can enrich your discussion.
- You might assign one person to lead opening and closing prayers or worship.
- You might assign a session to individual participants (or participants working in pairs). Encourage participants to become as familiar as possible with the material they have been assigned. They might do additional research on the ideas in the session, using commentaries or other study resources. They might write or summarize their discoveries in their own words, interview people in the congregation about the discipleship issues raised in the session, write discussion questions relating to the session, or bring someone who is an “expert” in the area that the session covers to your class session.
- Invite the pastor, congregational leaders, or others who could enrich your discussion, especially during specific sessions.

T H E S E S S I O N P L A N

This course is designed to be done in six consecutive sessions of 60-90 minutes each. If you are working with 60 minutes or less, you will find more material in each session than you can cover. Choose those items that seem most important for your discussion during your class session. Encourage participants to read over, think through and discuss with others the remaining materials between the sessions.

- Don't try to discuss every question. Choose those that seem important for your group. Don't press for “right” answers. Encourage all to express their insights and understanding.
- Return often to the focus of the session — the key component of discipleship. Help participants come to a better insight about how they are living out that discipleship component in their own lives.
- Keep the tone of the study encouraging. The purpose of the study is not to shame people into acting more like a disciple or to make them feel guilty over failed attempts in the past. Through this study, participants should be encouraged to open themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and to rededicate themselves to living as a disciple in ways that connect with their own lives. Not everyone will come to the same understandings, make the same commitments or carry through in the same way. Our task is to encourage one another in our discipleship journey.



T H E S E S S I O N P L A N *continued*

Each session follows this pattern:

- FOCUS The key theme for the session.
- PRAYER Use the prayer suggestions or other petitions from the group. Take turns leading the prayers for each session.
- OPENING DISCUSSION The questions in this section will help start a conversation and move participants into the focus of the session. If you have more than 6-8 participants, you may want to break into smaller groups to reflect on the questions. If time is short, you may want to select only one or two of the questions, or you may want to develop a question that is even more appropriate for your setting.
- SEARCHING SCRIPTURE In this section you will find a way to study the Scripture passages at the heart of the lesson. Move through this material one section at a time, reading the Scripture texts, reading and reflecting on the material in this guide, and talking about the questions as you have time.
- KEY COMPONENT OF DISCIPLESHIP By naming and defining each component, participants will be able to evaluate their own journeys as disciples. You might also use the definition to evaluate the way your congregation provides opportunities and encouragement for each person to grow as a disciple.
- MOVING TOWARD ACTION This section invites the question, “So what?” What difference does it make to know and understand this material? What needs to change in my own life? How will our study group change as a result of this discovery? What needs to change in our corporate ministry as a congregation to insure our ability to “make disciples” and lead others into this dynamic, life-transforming process?
- CLOSING Pray each week for the Holy Spirit to bring clarity of understanding to the process of discipleship. Pray for participants as individuals, the study group and your congregation. Pray for courage and strength to make the needed changes that become obvious as a result of the study.
- PREPARING FOR THE NEXT SESSION Each week participants will be asked to read biblical material for the next session. They will also be asked to reflect on a carefully chosen quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.

*“When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate humanity from all human dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience.... But does this mean that we ignore the seriousness of his commands? Far from it. We can only achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when his command, his call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety.” (The Cost of Discipleship, Introduction, p. 37) **

**Note: Some of Bonhoeffer's quotes selected for this study have been altered to be more gender inclusive.*

