Session 6: What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus Today?

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: A Christian is a disciple who knows Jesus intimately and follows him faithfully, becoming more like him throughout their life.

Head Change: To know that the Christian life is spent following Jesus and being formed into his image.

Heart Change: To feel excited about being Jesus's disciple and belonging to his family.

Life Change: To commit to following Jesus and belonging to a Bible-teaching church for the long haul.

SESSION'S QUESTION AND ANSWER

What does it mean to follow Jesus today?

Following Jesus is the process of believing in his life, death, and resurrection, trusting him as Lord and savior, walking with him daily by faith, and emulating his ways to others.

REVIEW LAST SESSION

In our last session, we explored the questions, "What happened on Easter, and why does it matter?" We talked about the events of the first Easter Sunday and their significance. Before diving into today's session, let's discuss the Deeper Walk exercises you chose. **Which one did you pick? How did it go?**

OPEN

Who is someone you've learned a lot from? What are the most impactful things he or she taught you, and how did that change you?

There are some people in life who we learn a great deal from. Whether a parent, a friend, or even an author we enjoy, these teachers impart lessons and wisdom that shape us in profound ways, even to the point of altering the whole trajectory of our lives. In this session, J.D. will argue that, of all the influences in our lives, Jesus is the most important. When we choose to follow him, we sign up for a lifelong journey of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus alongside our brothers and sisters in the faith.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What were the first followers of Jesus called?

What was the highest compliment you could give to a disciple in the first century?

What are the five primary identities that summarize Jesus's character?

Show Session 6: *What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus Today?* (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

J.D. opened this session by acknowledging the disconnect between many people's perceptions of what it means to be a Christian and what it *actually* means to be a Christian. He gave some of the common answers he'd expect to hear when asking random people if they're Christians: "Yes, but I don't think that . . ." or "Yes, but I didn't vote for . . ." Misunderstandings about Christianity are common. For what reasons do you think these misunderstandings exist? Have you encountered misunderstandings about what it means to be a Christian with people in your life? If so, what are some examples?

To help start a conversation about what it means to be a Christian, see Practice 2 in the Deeper Walk section at the end of this session

J.D. pointed out that the term "Christian" wasn't something early followers of Jesus called themselves. That term only appears three times in the New Testament and was generally used in a derogatory way to refer to Jesus's followers. Instead of Christians, Jesus's followers called themselves disciples. Read Acts 6:1–2, 7 and Acts 9:1, 19, 25–26, 38 to see the author's usage of the term "disciple." **Does it surprise you to learn that "Christian" isn't a term that was used by early followers of Jesus? Why do you** think we've adopted that label rather than the term "disciple"?

J.D. argued that "Christian" and "disciple" convey two very different things. In his view, "'Christian' functions like a sociological label," while "'disciple' describes a lifestyle decision." And by swapping these terms, "we have obscured the fact that a lot of people who call themselves Christians aren't actually Jesus's followers." **Do you agree with J.D.'s assessment? Why, or why not? How could using the term "Christian" instead of** "disciple" feed misunderstandings about what it means to follow Jesus?

If the term "disciple" is the preferred term we should use to describe ourselves, it begs the question: What is a disciple? How did firstcentury followers of Jesus understand what it meant to be a disciple? Simply put, a disciple was someone "who followed a teacher or rabbi around everywhere trying to imitate everything they did"-they wanted to know what their teachers knew and do what their teachers did. Read Matthew 4:18–20 and John 8:30–32. In these passages, Jesus's vision of being his disciple seems clear: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), do what I do (Matthew 4:19; John 8:31), and know what I know (John 8:32). In what ways does the first-century concept of being a disciple differ from the common understanding of what it means to be a **Christian today?**

For a Scripture memory exercise, see Practice 3 in the Deeper Walk section at the end of this session. A disciple of Jesus is someone who imitates him. But what does it look like to imitate Jesus? J.D. said it means we will emulate Jesus's three ministry agendas:

• Teaching and demonstrating the truth about God in all we say and do (teacher),

• Living by the principles and power of his kingdom (miracle worker),

• Proclaiming Christ's delivering power to all who are in bondage (deliverer).

To what extent do you seek to imitate Jesus in these ways? In what ways have you seen yourself grow as a disciple in these areas?

In this session, J.D. summarized the character of Jesus by highlighting "five primary identities that Jesus lived out . . . that served as the compass, the core for all that he did." J.D. said, "Adopting these five identities [is] what it means to follow Jesus." The first of these five is that Jesus was a worshiper. He glorified God with his life, prayed constantly, and praised him. Read Luke 10:21 to see Jesus worshiping God through praise. **How would you define what it means to be a worshiper? By your definition, would you describe yourself as a worshiper? Why, or why not?**

One distinction J.D. made about being a worshiper is that doing so is marked not by merely "doing Christian stuff"—which can be just "dry, dead religious formality"—but by possessing a passionate love for God. Is your worship more akin to a religious formality or a passionate love for God? What do you do to cultivate a deep love for God?

The second identity J.D. mentioned is that a disciple is a family member. When we believe on Jesus, he welcomes us into his family—the

family of God—a family that runs even deeper than our biological families. Read Mark 3:31–35. In this passage, Jesus shows that those who follow him—"whoever does the will of God" (v. 35)—are a part of his family. That means, as disciples of Jesus, we become committed members of his family, which is the church. **How do you react to the concept of the church as the family of God? Do you belong to a local church? If so, how would you describe your experience there? If not, what has kept you from attending a church?**

To explore the New Testament concept that Jesus's followers are the family of God, see Practice 4 in the Deeper Walk section at the end of this session.

Third, disciples of Jesus are servants. Read Mark 9:35; Mark 10:42–45. As Jesus did, we are called to use our power, position, or privilege to serve others. To what extent do you see your power, position, and privilege as occasions to serve others? What opportunities do you have right now to serve others? What small changes could you make in your life to focus on service?

One area of our lives where we can all serve is in the local church. In some ways, the church can't function properly *unless* its members serve. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–26. Paul, in this passage, is adamant that the church—the body of Christ—belongs together and should serve one another. **How does Paul's metaphor that the church is a body help inform your view of the church? In what ways does his metaphor**

encourage you that you're an indispensable member of the church?

As J.D. pointed out, our service to the church body not only benefits the church itself but also contributes to our spiritual growth. In what ministries in your local church have you served? How has serving in your local church contributed to your personal spiritual growth? If you don't currently actively serve, what ministries would you like to serve in?

The fourth identity J.D. mentioned was that, like Jesus, his disciples are stewards. God owns all that we have—our talents, our vocations, our finances, even our lives—and he has given us the responsibility of taking care of these things on his behalf and in his way. Read Matthew 25:14–18. In this passage, the owner, who represents God in the story, entrusted his servants with his possessions, to steward them faithfully. Which of the servants in Jesus's parable stewarded the owner's resources poorly? How so?

What does faithful stewardship look like in your life? In what areas can you grow as a steward?

To complete an exercise to help you grow as a steward, see Practice 1 in the Deeper Walk section at the end of this session.

J.D. asked a provocative question to summarize our identity as stewards. He asked if we've said, "Jesus, what do you want me to do with this life?" Have you asked this kind of question to Jesus? Do you find this question frightening or intimidating? Why, or why not? What would it look like for you to offer your life to Jesus wholeheartedly?

The final identity that Jesus's disciples take on is that of a witness. Read Matthew 28:18–20. In Jesus's final words to his disciples, which reverberate forward to his disciples to this day, he says the Holy Spirit will empower us to "be [his] witnesses." **How would you describe what it means to bear witness about Jesus? In what ways do you seek to be a witness?**

No matter your station in life, whether you're a doctor, lawyer, teacher, stay-at-home parent, college student, barista, or anything else, you can be a witness. Where God has placed you provides a unique context where you can tell others about Jesus. What opportunities does your current life stage provide for being a witness to Jesus? Who are the people you encounter that you wouldn't otherwise encounter? How could you take full advantage of those opportunities?

As J.D. noted, "To follow Jesus means that you assume the identities of worshiper, family member, servant, steward, and witness. This is what it means to . . . look like him, think like him, and live like him." Which of these five identities comes most naturally to you? Which of them do you find most difficult? What could you do to grow in each of these identities?

J.D. closed this series by reminding us that the local church is the context where growing as a disciple of Jesus works best and where "life-onlife transformation happens." His encouragement was to be increasingly involved in a local, Bibleteaching church—not a spectator, but someone deeply enmeshed in the life of the church. What's the next step you could take to deepen your involvement in the local church?

LAST WORD

Following Jesus is a lifelong journey. It was for first-century believers, and it remains true for us today. And following Jesus means just that: going where he goes and doing what he does. That's what being a disciple is all about.

And following Jesus is worth it. Why? Because he is the God-Man, the second person of the Trinity who died for our sins and rose from the dead, conquering sin and death on our behalf. He loves us, and when we follow him, he leads us to the fullness of life; life as it was meant to be; life as it will be once again. Will you follow him today?

SESSION'S QUESTION AND ANSWER

What does it mean to follow Jesus today?

Following Jesus is the process of believing in his life, death, and resurrection, trusting him as Lord and savior, walking with him daily by faith, and emulating his ways to others.

DEEPER WALK

This section is designed to help you practice different ways to interact with God and reflect on

3/23/25, 3:12 PM

what you've learned in this session. Pick at least one activity to try before the next session.

Practice 1: Stewardship Inventory

The idea that disciples of Jesus are stewards can be revolutionary. It's certainly different from our culture, where people are viewed as owners of everything who should always pursue more, more, more. In God's kingdom, everything belongs to God, and we are stewards of what he gives us.

One of the clearest ways we can assess our stewardship of what God has entrusted to us is by reviewing how we manage money. Are we generous? Are we open-handed with the things he's given? Do we live within our means? These are some of the questions we can ask ourselves regularly to make sure we steward our resources well.

Spend some time looking over your personal finances. Use these questions to honestly assess how well you're stewarding the money you've been given:

- What stands out to you about your finances? Are there any surprises (unnecessary bills/charges, amount of money you spend on certain budgeted or unbudgeted items, etc.)?
- Do you tithe or give to your local church regularly (even if it isn't a true ten percent)?
- When you assess your budget and spending habits, is generosity apparent? Are you pleased or displeased with your level of generosity in comparison to your other expenditures?
- If you find that you are displeased with the way you are stewarding your finances

currently, what are one or two steps you could take to make improvements?

Stewarding finances is important. But it's also important not to beat yourself up if your stewardship isn't yet where you'd like it to be. Ask God for help. He will give you the grace you need to conform your financial habits to his will.

Practice 2: Community

As J.D. pointed out, many people have different understandings about what it means to be a Christian. Some identify as Christians culturally or sociologically, some based on their family history, and some as a political voting bloc, while others ascribe to the biblical idea that a Christian is a disciple. Each of these understandings (and more!) may even be present within our own family, friend group, or Bible study group.

In this exercise, facilitate a conversation with your group to identify the different perspectives and to work toward a mutual understanding together. See if you can lead the group to agree on a definition of what it means to be a Christian that resembles the definition J.D. offered in this session. Consider using the following questions to help.

How do you define what it means to be a Christian? Has your definition changed at all over the years? If so, how and for what reasons?

What would you say are the most common misunderstandings about being a Christian?

Read Matthew 4:19 and John 8:31–32. How does Jesus portray what it means to be a

Christian? How does Jesus's portrayal compare to the answers the group has given?

Spend some time as a group using what you've shared and read to come to a consensus. End your time by praying together, asking God to help each of you grow as followers of Jesus.

Practice 3: Memorization

On the topic of discipleship and what a disciple is, Jesus has a lot to say. One instance when he addresses what it is to be a disciple occurs in Luke 6:40.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher."

Read the passage and memorize it to remind yourself that your goal as a disciple of Christ is to imitate Jesus.

Practice 4: Bible Study

In the New Testament, we learn that followers of Jesus aren't just disciples of Jesus—we are his family members. From the Gospel accounts to the epistles, familial language is used throughout the New Testament writings to refer to Jesus's disciples as members of the family of God. Read Matthew 12:46–50 and write down or highlight the family language in the passage.

The apostle Paul took these words of Jesus seriously. Read the following passages, noticing the familial terms the authors use.

Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:23; Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–25; James 5:19–20. Take heart: If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have been adopted and welcomed into the family of God. End your time by praying and thanking God that he made you a part of his family. RightNow Media Presents Why Does Jesus Matter? STUDY GUIDE

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