

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
September 7, 2014



JESUS SAYS

Discussion Guide

Follow Me

Mark 1.16-20; Luke 5.1-11

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Did you play “Follow the Leader” as a child? What was it like to play this game for you? How, if at all, do you see this childhood experience mirrored in requests to follow people as an adult?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Mark 1.16-20 aloud, slowly. Pause. Read the passage once more, aloud, slowly, trying to imagine yourself as Peter, Andrew, James, or John.
- What, if anything, do you feel as you seek to experience this text? Could you elaborate?
- What do you hear Jesus asking of you? Do you feel you are capable of responding? Would you explain?

- Use the Going Deeper notes and comments to explain the nature of Jesus’ calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John as well as the nature of doubt.
- Read Luke 5.1-11 aloud, slowly.
- What invitations does Jesus extend to Peter? What, if anything, stands out to you about these invitations?
- In what ways does Peter follow Jesus? Do any of Peter’s responses surprise you? Would you elaborate?
- Read Luke 5.1-11 once more, aloud, slowly, trying to experience the text as Peter.
- What do you hear Jesus asking of you? Do you feel you are capable of responding? Would you explain?
- How is following Jesus usually presented? Do you feel that this presentation is closer to the episode in Mark 1 or Luke 5?
- What responses, if any, have the typical presentations of following Jesus aroused in you? Why might this be the case?
- It has been said that Jesus does not ask for everything, all at once but that Jesus comes to us and asks us to follow him by following him one step at a time. React to this.
- What step might Jesus be inviting you to take with him right now? How have you been hearing this invitation? How might Jesus desire you to hear his invitation?
- Conclude your group time with a time of prayer for one another as you each respond to Jesus’ invitation.

Context and Background

Doubt

Doubt is an attitude of uncertainty about the truthfulness of a proposition. Doubt can involve a state of complete uncertainty or may be partial, such as when one agrees to a proposed reality but questions the trustworthiness or stability of that reality. Within the religious realm, doubt takes three different forms: philosophical, denial, and ignorance.

Philosophical doubt might be better defined as an attitude of skepticism. Such an attitude is not a denial of (religious) truth but an uncertainty because of a lack of evidence or experience. Skepticism often motivates people to seek an answer through various means so that this form of doubt might be relieved. Thomas' seeking to experience the physical body of Jesus before believing him to be resurrected is a good example of this form of philosophical doubt (skepticism) (John 20.24-29).

Denial is the refusal to believe a specific proposition in the presence of verifying evidence. As such, denial is not so much a refusal to assent to the reality of the proposition but a refusal to entrust one's self to the proposition. The demonic belief in God coupled with their refusal to believe (entrust themselves to) God is a prime example of denial (James 2.19; Genesis 3.4-5).

Ignorance is the most common form of doubt in which a person has an experience for which he does not have an adequate interpretive grid to understand. Therefore, he questions what he has experienced until he has further experiences or explanation which help him to grasp what lies before him. King Agrippa's interaction with Paul and the disciples' interaction with the resurrected Jesus are excellent examples of this form of doubt (Acts 26; Matthew 28.16-20).

What is important to note is that only doubt in the form of denial is labeled as sinful in Scripture. Jesus seems comfortable engaging people who are skeptics (Nicodemus in John 3) and ignorant (the two men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24). These forms of doubt are regularly present companions on the journey of faith and may even coexist with faith (Mark 9.24). The journey of faith appears to be one in which faith gradually overcomes doubt; followers of Jesus answer Jesus' invitations to follow him by taking small steps of obedience in which they experience Jesus' true nature and power which drives out doubt incrementally (Luke 5.1-11; Matthew 14.22-36, 15.15-20, 16.5-12, 13-28).

The Text

Mark 1.16-20: A Spiritual Drive-by?

In this passage, Mark records the calling of four of Jesus' disciples: Andrew, Peter, James, and John.

he way Mark records the episode leaves the reader with the impression that Jesus simply passed by these four men and called them to follow him. In response to this in-passing call, these four men leave everything and follow Jesus. The result is that people have interpreted the call to follow Jesus as an all-or-nothing experience. Jesus asks for everything, all at once. However, it is likely that Mark has simply distilled a much larger interaction between these four men and Jesus, an interaction which is expanded in the Gospels of John and Luke. In these two Gospels, it is apparent that Jesus did call these four to follow him and that they did leave everything to do so. However, they followed Jesus only after a period of interaction with Jesus in which they became familiar with him as a person and his message, and after they had experienced Jesus' true power and nature through small steps of obedience (John 1.40-42; Luke 5.1-11). Thus, Jesus' call to follow is anything but an in-passing call but is more of an ongoing experiential interaction in which these men grow to know and trust Jesus so they might answer his call.

Luke 5.1-11: Following Jesus

When Jesus invites Peter, James, John, and Andrew to follow him, at least two of these men have already met Jesus and come to know him (John 1.40-42). They have also come to know something about what is being claimed about Jesus' identity and purpose. They have experienced something of Jesus' power, as Jesus' first encounter with Peter is marked by an interesting foreknowledge of Peter's name by Jesus (John 1.42).

Some time later—we are not aware of how much time—Jesus happens to be teaching near the place of work for Peter, Andrew, James, and John. As Jesus is teaching, it becomes impossible for the crowds to hear him from the shore. Therefore, Jesus asks Peter to lend him his fishing boat as a platform for teaching the crowd. A measure of familiarity is more than likely present for the positive assent to be made to this request.

After Jesus finishes his teaching, he requests that Peter put out in order to go fishing in the deep water. This request is strange because it comes from the son of a carpenter, night rather than day is the best time to fish in the deep water, and the previous night yielded no fish.

Jesus' request is more than an imposition upon Peter. It is an invitation for Peter to entrust himself to doing something Jesus' way, to acknowledge in a practical manner that Jesus might know best.

Peter complies, reluctantly, and the result is that a large number of fish are caught. Additional help is needed to bring in the catch of fish which is so great that two boats begin to sink under its weight. Peter's obedience to Jesus' invitation is met with power, a power which frightens Peter. Peter falls before Jesus and requests that Jesus depart because Peter is sinful. This is not a confession of specific sin but a confession of Peter's recognized state in light of the experience of Jesus' power. Clearly Jesus is more than a man, someone who can control the sea and therefore one who has divine power. Peter is common and frail and has nothing in common, or so he believes, with Jesus.

Jesus calms Peter's fears with an assurance that he need not be afraid. Rather, Jesus insists that he has plans for Peter (and those in the boat) to become a fisher of men. Jesus holds out a vision for who Peter might be. In light of the experience of Jesus' power, Peter steps onto the shore and leaves everything in order to answer Jesus' call to follow.

Real life with Blake:

Following Jesus is hard for me. When I hear Jesus' invitation to follow him, I often interpret these invitations to be all-or-nothing invitations. I either do it all at once or I don't do it at all. Jesus wants me to step out and I have to do it NOW! No questions. No doubts. Just immediate, blind obedience. The problem is that I don't work this way. I do have questions and doubts. I struggle to understand the implications of obedience. So, Jesus' all-or-nothing call ends up being nothing for me. I am encouraged by this text because it portrays Jesus' call as much more gracious and gentle. Jesus kindly meets Peter and allows him to become familiar with who he is before he ever extends a call. When he does extend a call, it is stretching but doable. Put out the boat. Put down the nets. In response to obedience, Jesus shows Peter his power in an experiential way, clarifying the implications of further obedience.

In and through all of this, Peter is able to follow. As I think about my own faith journey, I can see that Jesus approaches me in a similar manner. He approaches me and allows me to grow into a state in which I can answer his call to follow.

Real life with you:

Following Jesus is often presented to us as an all-or-nothing experience, and so we respond with nothing. We simply cannot follow Jesus because we doubt. We question. We fear. When we actually consider the way Jesus invited people to follow him, we do not see an all-or-nothing approach. Jesus met people where they were and invited them to know him. As they came to know him, he invited them to trust him. As they trusted him he showed them his power and nature and out of these experiences they were able to follow. Jesus works the same way today. Following Jesus begins with a willingness to become familiar with who he is, followed by a willingness to trust him in small ways. Whether you are just considering following Jesus for the first time, or you are considering taking a deeper faith step, consider spending time getting to know Jesus. Read the Gospels. Learn who he is. Explore the nature of his person in a class like Exploring Christianity. As you come to know Jesus, step out and entrust yourself to him by answering the invitation to try things his way. Wait and see what happens when you try things Jesus' way and learn who Jesus is and what he can do. You will find that at this point following seems much more comfortable, a natural outgrowth of a growing relationship with Jesus.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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