

Biblical Passages

Matthew 10:37-39

Supporting Passages

Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:25-33

Memory Verse

Matthew 10:39

Biblical Truth

Being a disciple of Christ requires us to follow Him with complete and unwavering commitment.

Context

When we respond to Christ's invitation to follow Him, we find ourselves in the reality of a daily battle: the new spiritual nature of our souls fighting against our old sinful, selfish desires. Although salvation occurs at one point in time, believers are not automatically immune to sin; transforming into the image of Christ is a process. It requires daily sacrificing our thoughts, wills, desires, and actions to the thoughts, will, commands, and desires of Christ. Christ called His followers to sacrifice themselves completely to Him; we cannot commit pieces of ourselves to Christ and withhold other pieces. He has called us to give ourselves completely, without looking back, and love Him fully above everything and everyone else.

Learning Goals

- **Explore:** Learners will discover that following Christ requires their undivided commitment to Him alone.
- **Transform:** Learners will examine priorities in their lives that compete with Christ.

Investigation

The book of Matthew is traditionally attributed to the Matthew, sometimes called Levi (see Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), who was one of the Twelve. Prior to Jesus' call to follow Him, Matthew was a Jewish tax collector, a despised occupation by the Jewish population. As a tax collector, though, He likely had training in scribal techniques, which played a great role in his ability to write. As a Galilean Jew, Matthew was raised to understand and follow the Old Testament. He utilized these two abilities to write his book somewhat as a defense of the Messianic identity of Jesus. With a Jewish audience in mind, Matthew set out to provide evidence that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

In the context of this passage, Jesus was sending His disciples out to do His work and was giving them final instructions. That Jesus had a following of disciples was not uncommon in New Testament times. Rabbis often had followers who attached themselves to particular teachers. However, Jesus' instructions to these men differentiated Him from the rest. He not only spoke of God as His Father but also equated Himself with God by insisting the men love Him above everyone and everything else: Only God deserved such love (see Matthew 10:33,37). Jesus was the Messiah, and His disciples would face distractions along their journey. Jesus wanted them to know that following Him would require their full devotion.

Interpretation

Matthew 10:37 In the preceding verses, Jesus informed His disciples that persecution and hardship would certainly be a part of their lives as they followed Him and participated in His mission. This persecution would come as a result of their ties and allegiance to Him. Loyalty to Christ will inevitably cause His followers to make difficult choices about their priorities and devotion "because the message of God's kingship is one which always has and always will lead to violent response from those who are threatened by it" (France, 407). In fact, Jesus stated that His purpose was not to bring peace to the world but rather to bring a sword (see Matthew 10:34). The metaphor of a sword in this verse gave Jesus' disciples the message that Jesus was not a peaceful Messiah in the way they thought. Many Jewish people at the time thought the Messiah would come as a rescuer—to defend God's people from the evils of the current political world and restore their nation geographically and politically to a time of peace. Jesus would not bring this kind of peace though. He began to tell His followers that even the closest of relationships might result in turmoil because of Him.

Jesus was not stating that a disciple should instigate conflict with one's family as a way to prove loyalty. He did not intend for anyone to think that conflict is a virtue in and of itself (France, 409). Rather, this was an issue of priorities. Jesus addressed the closest of family relationships with this idea in verse 37. Loving one's family, particularly one's parents, was one of the highest duties of Jewish culture (Keener, Matthew 10:37), yet a devoted follower of Christ should love Him above everyone else and will not allow even one's closest relationships to compromise his or her devotion to the Lord. Because Jesus was God, He was able to demand this type of loyalty and love. As stated previously, "The only one who could rightfully demand greater love was God himself" (Keener, Matthew 10:37).

The idea of Jesus' use of the word *worthy* carried the idea of being deserving. In this context, it gave the picture that only those who love Jesus in this way are deserving of Him. He would accept those disciples into His kingdom who served Him above all costs because this was evidence of their genuine relationship with Him (Blomberg, 181).

Matthew 10:38 The mention of crucifixion would have brought a great shock to Jesus' listeners. Although it was a Roman method of execution, the people of the day were familiar with it, and most Jews considered it horrendous. In Roman Palestine, crucifixion was often the chosen form of execution for slaves and political rebels; it gave great social disgrace to any free person who experienced it. Crucifixion brought great physical suffering and indescribable shame. This shame could not be hidden, as the execution was a public display for all to see (France, 410). Part of the very public nature of crucifixion was the practice of making the condemned person carry the horizontal beam of the cross to the location of the actual execution. Usually a loud, taunting mob would surround the paths through which the condemned walked with the crossbeam (Keener, Matthew 10:38).

It is this horrendous picture that Jesus' disciples would have imagined when they heard His words to take up their cross and follow Him. Jesus clearly spelled out a life that could quite possibly contain a violent martyr's death and great public shame. In fact, this was precisely the death that Jesus Himself faced. His followers should expect no easier road. Although not all followers of Christ will endure such circumstances, only those willing to follow Him to whatever end He may lead, whether it be filled with suffering or even death, is deserving of being a disciple.

The word often translated "follow" or "follow after" can literally be translated "follow behind me" (Louw, 200, 717). Proper etiquette of the time dictated that a disciple physically walk behind his teacher (France, 147). In this verse, it gives the picture of following Jesus as leader into whatever and wherever He leads.

Taken together with the whole teaching of Scripture, the idea of taking up a cross and following Christ gives a complete picture of being willing to not only literally die for Christ but also replace one's own self-focused purpose and concerns in life with Christ's mission and purpose every day (see Luke 9:23). It is through this sacrifice that someone is truly identified as a disciple. The person has given control of his or her life to Christ.

Matthew 10:39 The phrases "whoever finds his life" and "whoever loses his life" (the first half of each clause) are literal commentary on saving and losing a person's physical life (Blomberg, 181). Similar to taking up one's cross, the imagery can easily extend to other sufferings that come about as a result of following Jesus (France, 411). The phrases "will lose it" and "will find it" (the second half of each clause) indicate a spiritual aspect of life and death. Therefore, one who seeks to preserve his or her life by renouncing Christ or chooses comfort and self-gratifying pleasures instead of discipleship is not a true follower of Christ; he or she will receive eternal death (see Matthew 13:1-23; John 15:6; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Hebrews 10:39). Conversely, one who endures death or suffering on behalf of Christ will receive life that ultimately cannot be taken away: eternal life (Blomberg, 181). Again, this statement is one of priorities. The true disciple will be more concerned with the "invisible reward" of pleasing the Father instead of the visible threats or temptations of this world (France, 411).

Implications

Knowing that salvation is available to all people, we have often unintentionally tried to make it more palatable for those who aren't actually interested in following Jesus. As a result, we now have many people who echoed a prayer at one point in life while never intending to make any sacrifices to follow Christ. They were interested in "eternal insurance," not a relationship with the Lord. A gospel that has been watered down to require no repentance or life change is not the gospel, and those who follow this "easy believism" are not disciples, according to Scripture. Jesus was not on a recruiting trip when He came to earth. He wasn't interested in marketing the gospel. Rather, He often turned away followers by making seemingly strange statements. And, when sending His disciples out on mission, He assured them of persecution and probably death. He didn't open an invitation; He laid out a challenge.

Most people will never have to literally choose between life and following Jesus, but that choice is and has been a reality for numerous believers around the world. Yet the lack of physical persecution is not an excuse to think that the Christian life will be easy. We cannot greet new believers with a rosy view of Christianity that is not biblical. Yes, following Christ is the greatest decision in life, and it brings much joy and happiness, but we must be careful to challenge new believers the same way that Jesus did His disciples. He did not invite people to simply believe in Him but go on with their lives as usual; He called people to follow after Him with undivided affection. The path of Christ is difficult and requires us to sign all of our lives over to Him. Being a disciple means that we follow Jesus wherever He leads, not just where it is popular or trendy to go.

Teaching Plan: Connect Activities

All activity sheets are at the end of this printable lesson

Introduction

(5 minutes, easy setup)

Pass out everyone's copy of *Start! To Follow* or provide instructions on how to acquire a copy of the book to be reading during the week between your group meetings. Explain that for the next six weeks, you will be digging into what it means to be a follower of Christ. Depending on your group's needs, clarify that this study provides information on how to personally follow Jesus as a disciple and that if your group is already spiritually mature, they will find useful the information on how to not only be a disciple but also make new disciples. (Depending on your group's dynamic, choose the Being Disciples or Making Disciples activity to conclude each week's lesson.)

Say: **The word *disciple* may not be common in today's world. It may even be intimidating. But a disciple is most simply a follower of Christ. Over and over, Jesus makes it clear that He came to call people into a life-changing relationship of following Him, nothing less. Maybe you are just starting this journey or maybe it is time for you to start inviting others to follow Jesus with you. Either way, these next six weeks will describe the Christian life—the life of a disciple.**

Explain to your group that each week, you will look at one part of a personal relationship with Jesus as a group, using the Bible to guide your time together. During the week, everyone will read from Greg Laurie's book a chapter or two that further explains that part of life as a disciple. Share the weekly overview to give everyone an idea of where they will be headed, noting that the number in parentheses refers to the book chapter for each week. (A weekly reading guide is also available with questions to reflect on personally. You may print it here.)

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

1. The Commitment—Discipleship is described as our commitment to Jesus and the Christian Life (chapter 1)
2. The Life—As disciples, our lives of surrender are empowered by God's commitment to us through His Spirit (chapters 2–3)

RELATING TO GOD

3. The Bible—Discipleship means knowing and treasuring God's Word (chapter 4)
4. Prayer—Discipleship involves a conversation with God, prayerfully conforming our desires to His (chapter 5)

RELATING TO PEOPLE

5. The Church—As disciples, we are a family that mutually benefits from building each other up (chapter 6)
6. The World—As disciples, we get to share everything we've experienced by inviting others into relationship (chapters 7–8)

From Our Lives

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Share the following story with learners:

For years, a pastor in Iran, Youcef Nadarkhani, was jailed because of his conversion to Christianity and his effort to convert other Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ. He was not only thrown into jail indefinitely but also condemned to death by hanging. The Iranian courts gave him multiple chances to recant his faith, but he refused.

Ask: **How would this kind of environment affect a person's response to Christ? How would it change the way we view following Jesus?** As learners share their thoughts, point out that most of us don't live with the same level of persecution as Youcef but that Jesus has called us all to the same standard of commitment. Explain that today we will discuss what it means to commit our lives to following Jesus.

From the Book

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Explain that in this week's reading, the author describes Jesus' increasing popularity and drawing of large crowds but that Jesus wasn't interested in being admired, respected, or entertaining. Preview the chapter by reading page 12 from *Start! To Follow* aloud, beginning at the first paragraph indentation. Then say: **Greg Laurie shows us that Jesus issued a clear challenge to those who wanted to follow Him because He wanted people to know what He expected. They were picking and choosing certain aspects of Jesus' life and message they liked and ignoring the rest.** Ask: **How does this sound like our lives today?** Allow brief discussion and then ask: **Has Jesus' expectation changed in the last two thousand years?** As learners answer, point out that Jesus didn't issue an easy challenge to those who wanted to follow Him.

Explain that today we will explore the difficult challenge that Jesus gave His disciples then and how it remains the same call for us today.

Student Option

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Ask students if they are familiar with this popular expression borrowed from poker: “All in.” Ask a volunteer to explain what the phrase means. Clarify that if they have seen poker on ESPN or elsewhere, they know that to go “all in” is when a player is confident or desperate enough to push all of their chips to the middle of the table, committing themselves fully to the cards they’ve been dealt. Explain that in the game, the hope is that they will be rewarded, at least doubling their chips by fully investing everything to the game. Ask students: **What are things in your own life for which you are willing to bet it all? Is there anything you are so passionate about that you would risk losing everything in hopes of seeing it succeed or experiencing some great reward?** Allow students to discuss anything about which they are deeply passionate or hopeful. Transition to the lesson by saying: **Today we’ll begin to see that we can’t give tokens of appreciation here and there to Jesus. To follow Him requires that we are all in because we know that He is a greater reward than anything in this world.**

Teaching Plan: Explore Activities

All activity sheets are at the end of this printable lesson

Interactive Core Study: The Commitment

(15–20 minutes, easy setup)

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Outline for your own use and copies of the Learner Worksheet for each learner. Provide pens, a marker board, and markers.

Distribute copies of the Learner Worksheet and pens. Inform learners that today’s passage occurs in a section of Jesus’ teaching in which He tells His disciples about what it means to follow Him, especially concerning persecution. Emphasize that this teaching was timely because Jesus was sending His disciples out among the area to proclaim the kingdom of God. Ask: **In light of the mission Jesus is sending the disciples on, He teaches them about the character of a disciple. What does this tell us about the relationship between the identity and purpose of a disciple?** (Answers may include that the mission of a disciple reveals character or that the life of a disciple and the mission of a disciple are congruous.) Point out that Jesus’ teaching in this passage and its surrounding context reveal that being a disciple is not easy. Say: **Our mission is not easy and persecution will come in some form, but a true follower of Christ exhibits an undivided life.**

1. A disciple’s priorities reflect undivided loyalty and love for Christ (see Matthew 10:37).

Enlist a learner to read Matthew 10:37. Share that the family in Jewish culture (specifically, caring for parents) was extremely important. Ask: **Considering that truth, why would this statement be so shocking to Jesus’ disciples?** Encourage learners to share their answers aloud. Point out that Jesus was requiring His disciples to love Him more than in even their closest earthly relationships, and that love could be expected from only God Himself. Ask: **What did this requirement reveal about Jesus’ identity?** Explain that because Jesus is God, His requirement to be loved above all is absolutely appropriate and essential.

Ask: **What is Jesus NOT saying in this verse?** As learners voice their answers, write them on the board under the heading “Not.” Be sure to include the answer that Jesus wasn’t instructing us to hate or neglect our families. Emphasize that along with the whole teaching of Scripture, we can know that loving one’s family, neighbors, and even enemies is expected. Ask: **What was Jesus requiring with His statement?** As learners share, write their answers on the board under the heading “Required.” Be sure to emphasize the answer that His disciples were to love Him and choose Him above everyone and everything else. Direct learners to describe why this type of love and loyalty to Christ is important to a disciple, especially in the face of persecution and hardship. Encourage learners to discuss their thoughts with the class. Point out that if Jesus is not the first priority in a disciple’s life, persecution and suffering will reveal a person who is a follower in title only. Clarify that hardship or even simple life choices will be dictated by whatever a person values over Jesus. Say: **To follow Jesus with our undivided attention and affection, He must obviously be our highest priority. Otherwise, the character will not match the mission.** Encourage learners to write the words *priority*, *loyalty*, and *love* in the first sentence.

2. A disciple surrenders complete control of his or her life to Christ (see Matthew 10:38).

Using the commentary, explain that crucifixion was a means of Roman execution that the Jews found incredibly horrific and shameful. Tell learners of the practice of making a criminal, often a political rebel, carry the large crossbeam of the cross upon which he would be nailed to the place of execution. Ask: **For the rebel who was carrying his cross, what was awaiting him at the end of that walk?** (death). Encourage learners to describe the attitude or mindset of someone who was following Jesus with a cross. (The discussion might include the following: he was prepared to die; she thought Jesus was worth giving one's life for; he lived for God's will and not his own; her allegiance was fully devoted to the kingdom of God instead of any earthly pursuits.) Point out the reality that most of us probably won't have to worry about physically dying because of our commitment to follow Christ. Ask: **What does it mean to our everyday lives that we will give up everything for Him?** As learners discuss their answers to this question, be sure to emphasize that we give up control of our lives to Christ, no matter what that means or where it leads. Say: **This doesn't mean we become passive followers of Christ, taking no responsibility for our lives or actions; it means we are obedient to wherever and whatever He calls us to and we live for His will, kingdom, and glory instead of our own.** Encourage learners to write the words *surrender* and *control* in the second sentence.

3. A disciple navigates life by clinging to what is eternal (see Matthew 10:39).

Write verse 39 on the dry-erase board. Explain that Jesus is saying that a disciple must choose between two realities to hold on to as his or her most prized possession. Say: **A person can live only one life, either following his own desires or Jesus'.** Draw a box around the first phrase, which should be a form of "whoever finds his life," and the third phrase, which should be a form of "whoever loses his life." Then draw a circle around the second phrase, a form of "will lose it," and the fourth phrase, a form of "will find it." Clarify that the boxes represent the saving or spending of one's physical life, and the circles represent the spiritual life. Explain that finding means "keeping back, holding on to, or guarding" and losing means "spending completely, sacrificing, or giving up." Ask first: **What would it mean to literally give up Christ in order to save our own lives? What would it mean to literally hang on to Christ, letting go of our physical lives?** Then ask: **Other than literal life and death, physically, what does this mean in more practical and day-to-day choices?** Allow discussion. Be sure to mention that selfish motives are revealed when we choose anything over Christ and that a desire to honor and serve Christ is revealed when a disciple values and obeys Him. Be sure it is understood that a follower of Christ will value Him over the things of this world, no matter the personal cost.

Ask: **Thinking about verse 38, what were the implications of verse 39 in how a disciple lived his or her life?** Allow learners to discuss their answers briefly. Explain that a person who is more concerned with guarding his own life than living fully for Christ will forfeit his life in eternity, and a person who willingly spends his life in this world for the sake of following Christ will find his life in eternity. Ask: **How does this conversation give us insight into the fact that this passage is not simply expectations but also evidence of true discipleship?** Point out that Jesus previously said that whomever did not do these things was not deserving of Him, meaning that he or she did not display the character of one who was a disciple. Say: **Only true disciples, people giving their lives completely to Jesus as they follow Him, will spend eternity with Christ.** Ask: **How does this truth change our perspective on life and our choices as a Christ follower?** Encourage learners to consider that a true disciple will consider the eternal effects of how they live and will choose to spend their lives on that which is eternal instead of what will be lost in the end. Encourage learners to write the words *clinging* and *eternal* in the third sentence.

Invite one or two learners to give a one-sentence summary describing Jesus' requirements for His followers, based on today's discussion. Emphasize the truth from the learning goal that Jesus requires our undivided commitment to Him alone. Transition to the additional Explore and/or Transform activities.

Master Teacher Core Study: Undivided

(15–20 minutes, easy setup)

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Outline for your own use and copies of the Learner Worksheet for each learner. Provide pens, a marker board, and markers.

Pass out pens and copies of the Learner Worksheet. Use the Master Teacher Outline to teach Matthew 10:37-39. Then lead learners to discuss the following questions:

- How do we often confuse the priority of religious activity with that of a true relationship with Christ?
- Although our actions don't earn our salvation, how are they evidence of our nature as true followers of Jesus?
- What is the most intimidating or challenging aspect of being a follower of Christ? Why?

- What has been the most difficult thing to surrender in your life since you placed your faith in Christ?
- How does a view toward the eternal change our attitudes in the here and now?

Closer Look: The Baffling Beauty of the Cross

(3–5 minutes, easy setup)

Review the following information about crucifixion from the commentary with learners:

- Crucifixion was a Roman form of capital punishment that Jews found horrendous.
- It was often the chosen method of death for slaves and political rebels.
- Because of its connection with slaves and rebels, those who endured it suffered great shame and mockery.
- Crucifixion was very public and the crowd often participated in the jeering and mockery.
- The person who was crucified endured great personal physical suffering before and during the crucifixion

Ask: **Would it shock the earliest disciples to imagine our culture’s flippant and ornamental use of the cross? What feelings do you think they had at the site of a cross?** Allow people to share perspectives and insights. Follow up by asking: **As modern disciples, how can we remember the shocking seriousness but also now see the cross as an object of incredible beauty?** Allow discussion. Be sure to note that we see the beauty in Jesus’ sacrifice making possible our new lives of freedom from sin and death. Emphasize that the cross represents letting go of this world’s way of living and declaring our loyalty to an eternal king whose reward is infinitely greater than any passing pleasure or pain in this world.

Comparative Study: Daily Denial

(5–7 minutes, easy setup)

Provide a dry-erase board and markers.

Enlist a learner to read Luke 9:23. Invite learners to compare this verse with Matthew 10:38. As they voice answers, write them on the board. Ask: **How do the words *deny himself* and *daily* give even more insight into what it means to carry a cross as a disciple?** As learners answer, note that daily denying ourselves tends to give a more concrete example in our modern-day culture as to what it looks like to carry a cross as a disciple. Emphasize that being a disciple means being willing to die not only physically but also every day to our own selfish pursuits in exchange for Christ’s glory. Point out that Jesus’ use of the word daily indicates that this is a continuous struggle for disciples and one that will require intentional effort. Say: **Being a Christian is more than just a onetime decision; it is a daily lifestyle of following Christ as our king.**

Teaching Plan: Transform Activities

All activity sheets are at the end of this printable lesson

Being Disciples

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Provide index cards and pens.

Distribute index cards and direct learners to list the following items on their cards: family, job, reputation, finances, stability, and influence. Explain that many times we conjure up ideas of evil things that hinder us from Christ, but often “good” things squeeze Him out of our top priority. Encourage them to consider how each of these items could potentially compete for their loyalty and priority to Christ. Lead the discussion by sharing a time when you had to reprioritize your life because one of these items was coming between you and your relationship with Christ. After a few minutes of discussion, ask: **What are some practical things we can do to balance integrity in these areas while also choosing to value Christ above them all?** Encourage learners to discuss practical ways to follow Christ above everything else. Suggest answers such as committing to integrity and honesty in the workplace no matter what circumstances occur, having an accountability time with a trusted friend, making financial plans to tithe and give to others while living on a budget, or maintaining a respectful attitude with hostile family members while still being intentional to voice the difference Christ has made in one’s life. Invite learners to look at the list on their cards and pick one or two areas that they know will be a struggle to reprioritize in their lives and then write specific ways they can begin to place Jesus first in those areas. After a couple of minutes, encourage learners to seek God’s help this week as they begin to implement their new loyalty to Christ.

Making Disciples

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Ask: **How have we watered down the idea of discipleship (following Jesus), and why is this dangerous?** Encourage learners to consider how culture has often made following Christ an issue of “easy believism,” which produces a lot of people who claim only the name of Christ but not His life. Ask: **Based on today’s lesson, how would you explain what it means to be a disciple of Christ to a new believer or to someone who is not yet a Christian?** Invite learners to get with a partner and practice explaining what being a biblical follower of Christ truly means. Allow several minutes for learners to finish. Then ask: **Think about a specific person when you answer this question: How can you intentionally model and teach the everyday priority of Christ in your life to someone you are discipling?** After learners have shared their answers, point out that when we are teaching others about Christ, we must be biblical and honest even if it means that Jesus’ words are too challenging for some people and they turn away.

Student Option

(5–8 minutes, easy setup)

Distribute index cards and direct learners to list the following items on their cards: school, reputation, future, friends, and activities/hobbies. Explain that many times we conjure up ideas of evil things that hinder us from Christ, but often “good” things squeeze Him out of our top priority. Encourage students to consider and discuss how each of these things on their list could take up so much time and energy that they have little or none for their relationship with Christ. After a few minutes of discussion, ask: **What are some practical things we can do to choose Christ first in our lives?** Encourage students to discuss practical ways to follow Christ above everything and everyone else. Suggest answers such as committing to a time of personal Bible study, having an accountability time with a trusted friend, using good time management to work on school projects, or maintaining a respectful attitude with hostile friends while still being intentional to voice the difference Christ has made in one’s life. Invite students to look at the list on their cards and pick one or two areas that they know will be a struggle to reprioritize in their lives and then write specific ways they can begin to place Jesus first in those areas. After a couple of minutes, encourage students to seek God’s help this week as they begin to implement their new loyalty to Christ.

Prayer Option

(3–5 minutes, easy setup)

Lead learners in a prayer of commitment by encouraging them to spend a moment praying silently and filling in their own needs after you voice the following prompts and pause at each blank for a moment:

Lord, I confess that I don’t always put You first. I struggle to follow You fully because I am concerned about _____.

I want to be willing to obey You, whatever that means. Right now I am afraid to obey because _____.

Give me the strength to obey You in the face of danger or persecution. Every day, I ask that You help me focus on the eternal instead of _____.

You are more worthy than any passing pleasure or pain in this world. I praise You for Your faithfulness to save me and give me the strength to _____.

Amen.

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Lesson 1. The Commitment / Undivided

BIBLICAL PASSAGE: Matthew 10:37-39

BIBLICAL TRUTH: Being a disciple of Christ requires us to follow Him with complete and unwavering commitment.

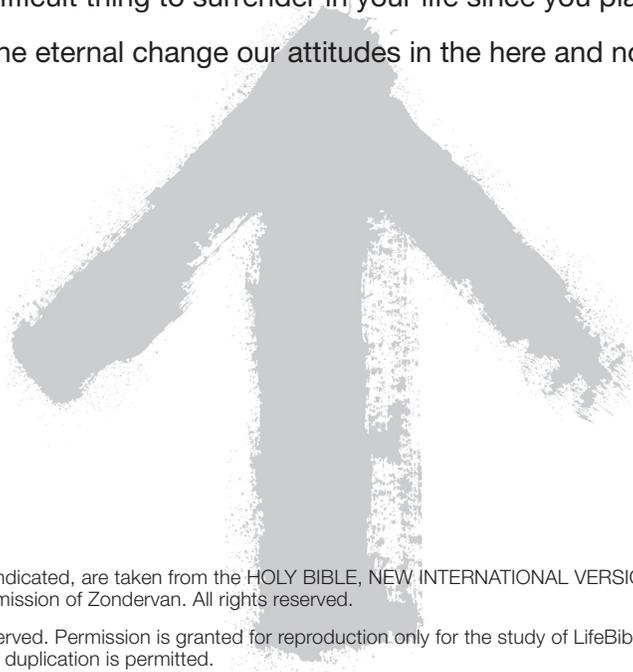
MEMORY VERSE: (Matthew 10:39).

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”

1. A disciple's _____ reflect undivided _____ and _____ for Christ (see Matthew 10:37).
2. A disciple _____ complete _____ of his or her life to Christ (see Matthew 10:38).
3. A disciple navigates life by _____ to what is _____ (see Matthew 10:39).

Discussion Questions

- How do we often confuse the priority of religious activity with that of a true relationship with Christ?
- Although our actions don't earn our salvation, how are they evidence of our nature as a true follower of Jesus?
- What is the most intimidating or challenging aspect of being a follower of Christ? Why?
- What has been the most difficult thing to surrender in your life since you placed your faith in Christ?
- How does a view toward the eternal change our attitudes in the here and now?



Undivided

(15–20 minutes, easy setup)

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with learners. Encourage learners to take notes on their copies of the Learner Worksheet as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Outline correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: Jesus' disciples did not gain a fast track to fame and fortune when they answered the call to follow Jesus. In fact, Jesus told them that their lives would never be the same and would be full of challenges. No matter what, though, Jesus wanted His followers to know that to truly follow Him meant that they fully gave their lives to Him in every way and loved Him more than anyone or anything.

1. A disciple's priorities reflect undivided loyalty and love for Christ (see Matthew 10:37).

- Jesus had just informed His disciples that they would likely experience persecution, possibly even from their families, because of their decision to follow Him.
- Taking care of one's family, particularly one's parents, was very important to Jewish culture.
- Because **Jesus is God and Savior**, He could require a disciple to value Him above anyone else, including the closest family loyalties. This commitment is so great and unique that nothing else is even worthy of being called "love" in comparison to a disciple's love for Jesus.

Illustration: For many new believers around the world, their conversion results in abandonment from their families. *The Voice of the Martyrs* often tells these stories of persecution, violence, and rejection. Despite pressure, though, those who are true disciples claim that Christ is worthy of their continued loyalty and love, even above family.

2. A disciple surrenders complete control of his or her life to Christ (see Matthew 10:38).

- Crucifixion was a well-known form of shameful public execution, which included having the criminal, often a political rebel, carry the crossbeam to the location of execution.
- Jesus wanted His disciples to know that to follow Him meant being willing to endure whatever came as a result of following Him and living for His kingdom, even suffering and death.
- Following Christ ultimately meant surrendering control of one's entire life over to Christ.

Interaction: What part of your life is the most difficult to give Christ control of?

3. A disciple navigates life by clinging to what is eternal (see Matthew 10:39).

- The first half of each phrase ("whoever . . .") refers to one's physical life, while the second half ("will . . .") refers to one's eternal spiritual life in Jesus' kingdom.
- Jesus wanted His disciples to know that those who truly follow Him in this world will live eternally and those who guard their own self-centered interests are not His followers.

Illustration: In a world full of microwaves, streaming video, and instant messaging, it can be difficult to be content with delayed gratification. We want quick results and little pain or effort. But following Christ often requires us to focus on the eternal because we are still living in a world full of sin and suffering. We can experience abundant life in the here and now, but our reward will not be complete until we reach eternity.

Conclusion: When we become Christians, Jesus becomes our Savior and our Lord. To be a true follower of Christ is to be more than a believer in name only. It is more than having "eternal life insurance." To follow Christ is to be a disciple, which is a calling to be devoted to Jesus and love Him more than anything or anyone else in this life. It means following Him no matter where He leads, no matter what the price or how difficult the journey, because He is worth it and His kingdom is our home.

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Lesson 1. The Commitment / Undivided

BIBLICAL PASSAGE: Matthew 10:37-39

BIBLICAL TRUTH: Being a disciple of Christ requires us to follow Him with complete and unwavering commitment.

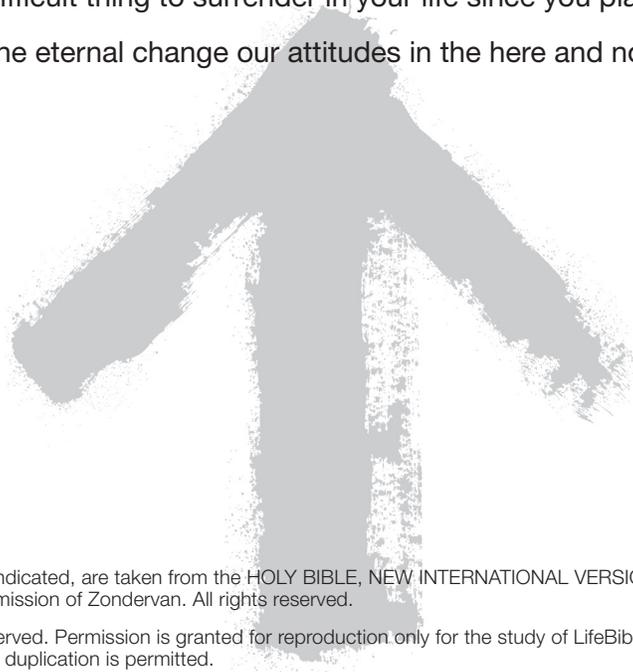
MEMORY VERSE: (Matthew 10:39).

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”

1. A disciple’s _____ reflect undivided _____ and _____ for Christ (see Matthew 10:37).
2. A disciple _____ complete _____ of his or her life to Christ (see Matthew 10:38).
3. A disciple navigates life by _____ to what is _____ (see Matthew 10:39).

Discussion Questions

- How do we often confuse the priority of religious activity with that of a true relationship with Christ?
- Although our actions don’t earn our salvation, how are they evidence of our nature as a true follower of Jesus?
- What is the most intimidating or challenging aspect of being a follower of Christ? Why?
- What has been the most difficult thing to surrender in your life since you placed your faith in Christ?
- How does a view toward the eternal change our attitudes in the here and now?



START!

TO FOLLOW

Small Group Discussion Guide





Discipleship Inside Out®

NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

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Start! To Follow Book by Greg Laurie

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California and Harvest Orange County in Irvine, California. He began his pastoral ministry at the age of 19 by leading a Bible study of 30 people.

Since then, God has transformed that small group into a church of some 15,000 people. Today, Harvest is one of the largest churches in America, and consistently ranks among the most influential churches in the country.

In 1990, Laurie began holding large-scale public evangelistic events called Harvest Crusades. Since that time, more than 4,408,000 people have attended Harvest Crusades events around the United States, ranging from the annual event at Angel Stadium in Anaheim to Madison Square Garden in New York City. Greg spoke to 50,000 people at a 2011 Harvest Crusade in Los Angeles' Dodger Stadium. Harvest Crusades have also been held internationally in Australia and New Zealand. More importantly, more than 371,300 people have registered professions of faith through these outreaches.

Start! To Follow Small Group Guide by Rick Howerton

Rick Howerton is national small-group strategist for NavPress, spearheading NavPress's small-group publishing efforts. An experienced ministry veteran, Rick has degrees from Campbellsville University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He spent ten years involved with college ministry; in 2003, he planted The Bridge, a church centered on small groups. Rick served as associate teaching pastor and small groups pastor at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky, for seven years and ten years at Lifeway Church Resources as a small-group-ologist/specialist. He is the author of several books, including *A Different Kind of Tribe: Embracing the New Small-Group Dynamic*.



Gathering 1, The Commitment

Introduction

I'm thrilled that you're here. Showing up proves that you want to be a committed follower of Jesus.

The six weeks we're going to spend together will probably change the way you think, make decisions, and live. What we'll be discussing over these six weeks is revolutionary because it unearths what a disciple's life really looks like.

I'm journeying with you, and all of us are journeying together. Followers of Christ never go it alone. We gather in communities of like-minded believers all journeying together, learning together, growing together, and encouraging one another. We need one another if we are going to live the radical lifestyle Jesus calls each of us to: that of a disciple.

Today we're going to talk about the level of commitment necessary to be a disciple of Jesus. Before we do that, I'd like to ask each of you to answer a couple of easy questions.

Our Story

Question 1: When you were in high school, which of the following did you sacrifice the most for? In one sentence, tell why you were willing to sacrifice so much for that person, team, or job.

- my girlfriend
- my boyfriend
- my family
- my best friend
- my sports team
- my job
- Other: _____

Question 2: Would you describe yourself as one of Jesus' disciples? In one or two sentences, tell us why you answered the way you did.

Prayer by Group Leader

Transition

This is going to be a fun group, I can tell. I'm sure each of us has wondered what is required of us if we're going to be a disciple of Jesus. We need to keep in mind that "to be a Christian you need to believe in Jesus Christ, whom God sent, and then you will receive eternal life through Him. It's a *gift*. To be a disciple is to take up the cross daily and follow Him making His will your will. It's a *commitment*." (See page 22.) This commitment is a personal relationship.

In fact, "loving God more than anyone or anything else is the very foundation of being a disciple." (See page 13.)

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His Story

[Have a group member read Luke 14:25-33 aloud]

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

*What is Jesus telling us to do before we consider declaring that we are one of His disciples?
(see verses 28 – 32)*

Why does Jesus want us to consider whether or not we are willing to make the necessary sacrifices before choosing to be one of His disciples?

Three times, Jesus says the phrase "cannot be my disciple." Each time He uses this phrase, He's telling those in earshot one of the nonnegotiable expectations of anyone who would become a disciple of His. What are the three expectations Jesus says are necessary for anyone who wants to be His disciple (see verses 26-27,33)?

Obviously, according to Scripture, Jesus doesn't want us to hate anyone. What do you think Jesus means when He uses such strong language to describe a disciple's other relationships in comparison to Him?

What are some indicators that we've elevated an earthly relationship above our relationship with Jesus?

What are the two things Jesus says any disciple of His must be willing to give up in order to be one of His disciples?

The Journey

What are some of the reasons believers allow family members to have control over their lives instead of allowing Jesus to guide their lives?

How might any of these relationships be affected, positively or negatively, if you choose to become a fully devoted disciple of Jesus Christ?

Which of the relationships or things Jesus mentioned is most apt to keep you from committing wholeheartedly to becoming one of His disciples?

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Which of the following things causes you to hesitation in becoming a fully committed disciple of Jesus? Choose more than one option if true of you.

I'll have to give up a relationship I enjoy.

There will be tension between me and someone else.

I'll feel guilty for allowing my heart to be more passionate about Jesus than about someone else who's important to me.

God will ask me to give up everything I've worked so hard for.

I fear death, and Jesus asks us to be willing to die for Him.

My spouse and I will not be on the same page, so our marriage will be affected.

Other: _____

J. Dwight Pentacost wrote about the seemingly radical Christian life (see page 19). He determined that believers fall into one of three categories: curious, convinced, and committed. Those who are curious “are attracted to the message, and maybe even to the Christian life, but they aren’t fully convinced it’s true.” Those who are convinced have concluded that Jesus is the Son of God. They have mentally grasped the essential understanding that Jesus is who He said He is but haven’t yet committed their entire life to Him. Those who are committed have not only concluded that He is God’s Son but also put their entire lives into His hands. He is their Lord, and they give Him the authority to guide their lives; they are His disciples.

I’d like for each of you to take the index card I’m giving you and write on that card which category you fall into. Are you curious, convinced, or committed? I’d be grateful if you’d also write your name on the card. I’m simply going to be praying for you that you’ll step into the committed category very soon if you haven’t already.

Prayer Time

[Explain that each week you’d like to hear one thing each person has learned and how you can be in prayer for them to apply that truth in their daily lives. Encourage openness and discuss the importance of having a safe, confidential environment for the group. After each person has shared personally, if time allows, invite any other prayer requests to also be shared. Pray for everyone’s growth and commitment as a disciple as you follow Christ together each day.]

Agreeing to the group covenant:

It is vital that each of us understands and agrees to the same expectations. By doing this, we will all be on the same page and know for sure that we can talk about anything together. Let’s see if we can all agree to the following expectations:

1. We will all attend the group gathering every week.
2. Everyone will engage in the conversation each week, but no one will be allowed to dominate the conversation.
3. No one will give advice to another group member unless it is requested.
4. We will keep everything discussed between group members confidential.
5. We will welcome one another’s opinions and be respectful of one another even when we disagree.

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Weekly reading

Before we go, I'd encourage everyone to take advantage of this personal reading and reflection guide during the week between our gatherings. (Pass out the guides.) This will help us all get the most out of our journey through what it means to follow Christ as His disciple. The *Start! To Follow* book will help you further explore the biblical truths introduced each week during our gatherings. The guide will suggest a chapter to read from the book and also a few related Scriptures with daily thoughts for your personal reflection. (Pass out books if you or your church provided books; otherwise, encourage everyone to pick up a copy.)

Dismissal

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Small Group Discussion Guide



Thank You for sampling the first lesson of Start! To Follow from LifeBibleStudy.
The complete Start! To Follow Small Group Discussion Guide
is available by purchasing the Start! To Follow Bible study.