

How Can I Be a Better Disciple of Jesus Christ?



Session 1



2 Timothy 1:3-7; Mark 14:32-40

Session Objective






In this session participants will learn about the lifelong, all-encompassing call of discipleship. They will consider various discipleship practices. They will grow in discipleship by discovering and rediscovering Scripture and by nurturing their relationship with Jesus Christ in the context of our Reformed heritage.

Faith Statement

We most surely believe that God preserved, instructed, multiplied, honored, adorned, and called from death to life God's church in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh.

—Scots Confession (3.05)

Session Overview

 Enter	Option A: Disciples' Snacks
	Option B: Creating New Verses
 Engage	Option A: Resting with the Question
	Option B: Apostle or Disciple?
	Option C: Deep and Wide Cross
 Explore	Option A: Film Clip— <i>Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back</i>
	Option B: Following Directions
 Express	Option A: Discipleship Playoffs
	Option B: Spiritual Reflections
 Exit	Option A: Group Prayer
	Option B: Discipleship Footprint



Enhancements

Family Connections
Web Connections



For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Go to waytolive.org, an interactive version of the book *Way to Live*,¹ which comes from the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith. Explore the Web site and reflect on the all-encompassing nature of Christian discipleship. Scroll over Practices in the upper left corner to see the project's eighteen categories of Christian practices. Explore a few of the categories to hear youth and young adults talk about the various practices, to "ask" the youth and young adults questions, and to see five challenges that connect with the category. Spend time reflecting on the questions that are available to "ask" the youth and young adults.

Next, go to practicingourfaith.org, also from the Valparaiso Project. Each of its twelve categories of Christian practices with links at the top right of the screen offers an introduction to spiritual practices, worship and prayer materials, books and films to study, related in-depth documents, information about ongoing projects, and an opportunity to share your ideas.



Understanding the Scripture

The Scripture passages for this session reference three of the most important and visible types of disciples in the first-century church: Jesus' close circle (Peter, James, and John), evangelists after his death (Paul and Timothy), and early believers (the church at Ephesus). It is easy to imagine Paul and the named disciples as complete, perfect characters and to envision the early Christian communities as golden examples of Christian faith. However, the early Christian disciples fumbled about in their spiritual growth, very much as we do today.

In Mark 14:32–40, we read about Jesus' closest friends failing him. This story reminds us that mistakes are part of a lifelong process of spiritual growth. Many of the stories about the named disciples (especially Peter) prove that anyone can overcome their shortcomings. In 2 Timothy 1:3–7, Paul tells Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God." Paul's point is not to belittle Timothy, whom Paul elsewhere calls his "loyal child" (1 Timothy 1:2) and "beloved child" (2 Timothy 1:2), but to encourage him through the doldrums of discipleship.

1. Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, eds. *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002).



Understanding the Faith Statement

The *Scots Confession* was commissioned when the Scottish Parliament declared Scotland a Protestant nation after a long, virulent political and sometimes violent battle.² It was important for Protestants in the early Reformation to acknowledge their essential connection to the historical church of Christ, namely that theirs was not a new religion, but a Spirit-led manifestation of Christianity. Accordingly, after an initial statement about God, the main focus of the *Scots Confession* is a retelling of sacred history. Embedded in the confession's biblical narrative, the Faith Statement for this session affirms further that God has been an active agent in the church, instructing its spiritual growth, with the implication being that God will continue to do so for the contemporary church.



Teaching Today's Question

At the 218th General Assembly (2008), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) committed to “foster the growth of Christ’s Church Deep and Wide,” partly in response to declining membership, and partly as a “natural consequence of the Christian life.”³ This commitment includes growing in discipleship, evangelism, servanthood, and diversity. Check out deepandwide.net for more information.

Discipleship may not be a familiar concept to some of your participants. Help them understand its imprecise nature: growth without an end, actions sometimes without obvious and immediate effect, sometimes personal, sometimes communal, sometimes orderly, sometimes creative. Help participants understand that discipleship is a process!

2. *Book of Confessions, Part I of The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2007), p. 10.

3. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 218th General Assembly (2008), Resolution 12–02, “Grow God’s Church Deep and Wide.”



Enter

Option A: Disciples' Snacks

- Plates, napkins, spoons, pita bread, hummus and/or tabouli, cups, grape juice, optional: olives, dates, cooked falafel, stuffed grape leaves, baba ghanoush, dried fish

Before participants arrive, set out the plates, napkins, spoons, and the collection of foods. Check with youth and parents about possible food allergies.

As participants arrive, invite them to share in the prepared feast with foods that Jesus and the disciples might have eaten. Pray the opening prayer.

Option B: Creating New Verses

- Music player, recording of "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian," newsprint and markers

Before the participants arrive, write the following on newsprint:

Lord, I want to be a Christian, in my heart.
 Lord, I want to be more loving, in my heart.
 Lord, I want to be more holy, in my heart.
 Lord, I want to be like Jesus, in my heart.

Play the recording as participants enter, and invite them to create new verses, silly or serious. When enough participants have arrived, sing the song together, with a few of the new verses. Pray the opening prayer.

Opening Prayer

God of love, help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Give us the vision and creativity to discover how you want us to live. To you be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (Based on 2 Peter 3:18.)



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question

Lead the participants in a conversation that engages the question for this session, "How can I be a better disciple of Jesus Christ?" Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to this question or use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- What is a disciple? What is a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- Who is someone you consider a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?
- What responsibilities come with being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- Do you consider yourself a disciple of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

Option B: Apostle or Disciple?

Bibles, copies of "Apostle or Disciple?" (Web Resource 1a)

Distribute copies of "Apostle or Disciple?" (Web Resource 1a) to the participants and review the information together. Further compare and contrast apostles and disciples by exploring the following questions together:



- What did Jesus' apostles do? What did his disciples do?
- What do apostles and disciples do today?
- Is your congregation more apostolic or disciple-like? Share some examples.
- Are you more of a disciple or apostle? When are you most like either? Do you expect this to change over time? How or why not?
- How can you be a better disciple of Jesus Christ?

Option C: Deep and Wide Cross

Bibles, wrapping paper tubes, strong tape, newspapers, water, glue, large bowl

Tell your group that over four sessions they will make a Deep and Wide Cross and that in this session they will make the vertical, deep piece of the cross, to symbolize discipleship. Follow these instructions to make this part of the cross:



- Cover a table with newspapers and mix papier-mâché paste in a bowl: about $\frac{3}{4}$ glue and $\frac{1}{4}$ water.
- Make a form by taping together the wrapping paper tubes. (Note: You will make the base for the cross in Session 2.)
- Tear newspaper into inch-wide strips. Dip a newspaper strip into the bowl of paste, and squeeze off any excess paste. Place the pasted strip onto the form, smoothing it out. Repeat with the other strips, covering your entire mold in pasted strips about two layers thick.

For a less messy option, start with a freestanding cross and wrap the upper vertical cross-piece with ribbon, string, or fabric. Incorporate creative examples of discipleship, including headlines cut from recent newspapers or photos of the participants.

As the participants work, explore the following questions about discipleship:



- What is a disciple? What is a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- How is Christian discipleship deep? How is it wide? How does Christian discipleship grow the church?
- Who is someone that you consider a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?
- What responsibilities come with being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- How can you be a better disciple of Jesus Christ?



Explore

Option A: Film Clip—*Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

Bibles, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, PG) and movie-viewing equipment

Before the session, preview the following clip from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*: 1:08:09–1:13:20.

Explain to your group that in this movie, Luke Skywalker, already a hero for the good side, is learning how to be an even better spiritual warrior, with the help of Yoda. In previous scenes (chapters 23, 26, and 28), Luke has refused to trust Yoda, and in this clip he again tries to use his own power, rather than following the Force. Notice how Yoda teaches him with patience and example. Watch the clip together and explore the following questions:



- What did Luke learn?
- How are you like Luke? When do you trust yourself more than God?
- Who is like Yoda in your life? Why?

Make sure each participant has a Bible and read 2 Timothy 1:3–7 together. Divide the participants into groups of three or four and have the groups discuss the following questions:



- How is discipleship like “rekindling” a fire?
- Why do followers of Jesus Christ need to keep learning?
- Can disciples ever stop learning? Why not?
- How are Jesus’ disciples like Luke Skywalker? (*They make mistakes, but they keep learning.*)

Option B: Following Directions

Five slips of scrap paper for each person, music player, upbeat music

Give each person five slips of scrap paper and explain the following instructions to your group:

- As the music plays, mingle around the meeting space, giving high fives to people in the group.
- When the music stops, quickly find a partner.
- Share a story with your partner based on the prompt you are given. You are not allowed to use the words *I*, *me*, *my*, or any other direct reference to yourself when you tell your story!
- Whenever you do use *I*, *me*, *my*, or any other direct reference to yourself, you must give one slip of scrap paper to your partner.



Story Prompts

- Tell your partner about the last time you went to a movie.
- Tell your partner about your last family vacation.
- Tell your partner about your favorite class in school.
- Tell your partner about the last time you cooked something.

Play the music for a short time. When you stop the music, have participants get into pairs and offer a prompt from the Story Prompts above. Try a few rounds and let participants laugh about how many scraps of paper they won or lost.

Reflect on the game by exploring the following questions:



- What was difficult about this game?
- Where and when in real life are directions difficult? Why is it sometimes hard to follow directions?
- Do you think it was easier or harder for Jesus' disciples to follow his directions than for you to follow the teachings in the Bible? Why?

Make sure each participant has a Bible and have the participants read Mark 14:32–40 together. Explore the following questions about the difficulty of discipleship:



- Why did Jesus' disciples fail to follow his directions? Why did they continue to fail even after Jesus confronted them about falling asleep?
- How are mistakes a part of discipleship?
- When have you made a mistake that helped you grow in faith?
- What do you have in common with Jesus' disciples in the story?
- Why are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?



Express

Option A: Discipleship Playoffs

- Copies of "Discipleship Playoffs" (Web Resource 1b), pens, newsprint and markers

Give each participant a copy of "Discipleship Playoffs" (Web Resource 1b) and a pen. Have each person complete the tournament brackets on his or her own by responding to the question "Which is more important to being and growing as a Christian?" While the participants work, copy the brackets onto a sheet of newsprint and post in a visible location.

As a group, discuss and vote on the most important discipleship activity for each pairing and record the "winner" on the sheet of newsprint. Continue until the group arrives at their understanding of the most important discipleship activity on the page.

Option B: Spiritual Reflections

Choose one of the following four spiritual experiences or set up four stations for participants to move through. Consider playing contemplative music or have the participants do this activity with intentional silence.

1. *Lectio Divina*

Copies of "*Lectio Divina*" (Web Resource 1c), candle, matches

Dim the lights, light a candle, and invite the participants to sit around the candle. Give each person a copy of "*Lectio Divina*" (Web Resource 1c) and invite participants to follow the instructions on the page.

2. Spiritual Images

"Spiritual Images" (Web Resource 1d), paper, pens

Invite the participants to look carefully and meditatively at the images found on "Spiritual Images" (Web Resource 1d). Then have the participants write a prayer or poem that responds to the images.

3. Labyrinth

Prepare a labyrinth, and have the participants walk it contemplatively. Search online for information on how to make or purchase one.

4. Sand Prayer

Sand and large, shallow container

Pour the sand in a large, shallow container. Invite the participants to take turns running their fingers slowly through the sand, sketching into it words or images that come to mind when contemplating discipleship.

After a few minutes of experiencing one or more spiritual practices, explore the following questions together:



- How did you feel while participating in the spiritual practice(s)?
- How can an activity like this affect your growth as a disciple? What would happen if you did this every day? How and why would it help you grow?
- Other than prayer and prayerful activities, what can help you be a better disciple?



Exit

Option A: Group Prayer

Gather the participants and give each person an opportunity to share a prayer request with the rest of the group. Close by praying for the requests that have been voiced and by saying the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, go with us into the world, challenging us to be your hands and feet in a world that is in need of your amazing love. Help us continue growing in our spiritual practices as we strive to be better followers of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Option B: Discipleship Footprint

Copies of “Discipleship Footprint” (Web Resource 1e), pens

Give each participant a copy of “Discipleship Footprint” (Web Resource 1e) and a pen. Invite the participants to fill in the blanks to figure their discipleship footprint. Explore the following questions together:



- How accurate was this tool at describing you as a disciple? Can it be a useful indicator of your strengths and weaknesses? Why or why not?
- What are some other ways to evaluate your current discipleship practices?
- What are some ways in which you could be a better disciple of Jesus Christ?
- Is growing as a disciple more about making decisions or developing habits? Why?

Pray the closing prayer.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

“Family Connections” (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for families to talk about after each of the four sessions. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Web Connections

Invite participants to visit deepandwide.net and e.vangelize.us to learn more about the PC(USA)’s Deep and Wide initiative and share ideas. Also, invite participants to visit the Web site waytolive.org to learn more about spiritual practices for teens.