

Why Isn't Belief in Jesus Enough When You Are a Christian?



Session 1



Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 4:16-21; Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-12, 16

Session Objective

In this session, participants discover:

- How God invites all believers into Christian service in their baptisms
- That God's call to service is shaped by God's hopes and God's work in the world
- That an element of risk and adventure is involved in saying "yes" to God's call
- How the words *calling* and *vocation* are used to describe God's invitation

Faith Statement

In baptism, the church celebrates the renewal of the covenant with which God has bound us to God's very self. By baptism, individuals are publicly received into the church to share in its life and ministry, and the church becomes responsible for their training and support in Christian discipleship. When those baptized are infants, the congregation, as well as the parents, has a special obligation to nurture them in the Christian life, leading them to make, by a public profession, a personal response to the love of God shown forth in their baptism.

—Confession of 1967 (9.51),
Inclusive Language Text

Session Overview

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Enhancements

Family Connections
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Film Connections
Profiles in Ministry
Take a Risk
Web Connections



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

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and give thanks to God for an opportunity to remember who you are. Read Luke 4:16–21 and Ephesians 4:4–6 and then reflect on the following questions:

- What words or phrases most engage you in Jesus' reading from Isaiah (Luke 4:18–19)? Why?
- How was your baptism an invitation to serve in God's kingdom? How did you discover the gifts God gave you to serve?
- What actions or reminders help you remember who you are in the busy days of your life?
- What comes to mind when you hear the word vocation? What is your vocation?

Give thanks for this time spent with God. Offer a prayer for the participants in your group, that they would be reminded of who they are and the mission to which they've been called in their baptisms.



Understanding the Scripture

The three Scripture passages for this session describe the Christian identity given to us in our baptisms. In baptism, Jesus received confirmation of his calling to bring about the kingdom of God (Matthew 3). He described this identity and mission in a sermon to his hometown in Luke 4. In baptism, we receive our new identity in Jesus Christ and we are called to participate in Jesus' work to make the kingdom of God known in our world. God gives individuals gifts and talents to help the church fulfill this mission. (Some of these gifts and talents are listed in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and Romans 12.)

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus fulfills Scripture as a new prophet, greater even than Moses, an understanding of Jesus that allowed communities to include a wider group of believers. Matthew encourages the communities of Jewish Christians displaced after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed to continue following Jesus with their commitments and practices of compassionate power, healing mercy, and inclusiveness that proclaim God's empire, rather than Rome's values of imperial social and familial systems.¹

Like Matthew, Luke stresses the Jewish roots of the Christian communities, yet broadens the groups of people who are included in Jesus' life and work. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus befriends outcasts, seeks and saves the lost, and sends his followers out with the good news to the ends of the earth. Followers of Christ who were expelled from synagogues found themselves inside the kingdom of God.

1. Warren Carter, "The Gospel According to Matthew," *The New Interpreter's Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. Walter Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), p. 1745.

The Letter to the Ephesians addresses unity between Jewish and Gentile believers and worship of the one God. It describes God’s plan to reconcile all peoples through Jesus Christ and the cosmic significance of God’s reconciliation for harmony in the universe. The verses from Ephesians 4 articulate that all people are part of the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. In this unifying identity, the church has the great purpose to participate in God’s reconciling work. Differences in believers—such as between Jew and Gentile—are gifts God has given so that the body of Christ, the church, will mature and be better able to participate in God’s reconciling work.

God’s reconciling work is described most succinctly in Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth, where he summarized his ministry and linked it to God’s ongoing work and hope for the world. At his baptism (described in Matthew 3), Jesus understood his anointing, seen in the revelation in the open heavens, the Spirit’s empowering him, and the dove’s descending upon him. Coming with faithfulness to be baptized, Jesus consents to his God-given commission, the same commission he later gave to the disciples and to all followers.



Understanding the Faith Statement

The Confession of 1967 applies the theology of earlier confessions of the church to the issues brought up by life in the turbulent decades of the mid-twentieth century, including racial discrimination, family and class conflict, and nationalistic arrogance.² The confession focuses on the reconciliation of the world by God and how the church embodies this as individual Christians and as churches. The faith statement for this session describes how we are commissioned in our baptisms to do God’s work in the world, just as Jesus in his own baptism entered a ministry of bringing God’s hope, peace, and healing to the world. In baptism, we are joined in Christ to the church to participate in God’s reconciling work.



Teaching Today’s Question

Adolescents are right in the middle of forming adult identities by making decisions about their values, priorities, and future goals. This session reminds us of God’s call in each of our lives—our Christian vocation—that we receive in our baptism. As you lead this session, emphasize how God is in the middle of our understanding of vocation in all the learning activities. God issues the call and invites us to say “yes” to an adventure that will stretch, surprise, and delight us beyond anything we could imagine. Encourage the participants to use the words *calling* and *vocation* to designate God’s invitation to them and all people to become partners in the healing of the world.

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. 252.



Enter

Option A: Vocation Graffiti

- Newsprint and markers

Before the session, write the word *vocation* on a sheet of newsprint and post the newsprint in a visible location.

As participants arrive, invite them to add a word, phrase, or drawing that helps define the word *vocation*. Encourage conversation about vocation and instances of when the participants have heard the word used.

Option B: "Cross of Gold"

- Collection of various cross necklaces, music player, recording of "Cross of Gold" by Michael W. Smith

Before the participants arrive, place the cross necklaces on a table in the center of the meeting space.

Listen to "Cross of Gold" together, asking the participants to remember words or phrases of the song lyrics that are especially meaningful to them. Explore the following questions:



- What words or phrases did you remember? Why were these words or phrases meaningful to you?
- What message about being a Christian is in this song? Do you agree with the message? Why or why not?
- What message is a person sending if he or she wears a cross necklace?
- What responsibilities come with wearing a cross necklace or other cross jewelry?



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question

Lead the participants in a conversation that engages the question for this session, "Why isn't belief in Jesus enough when you are a Christian?" Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to this question or use the following questions to guide the discussion:



- What does *vocation* mean?
- What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ?
- What does God call Christians to do or to be?
- What does God want you to do with your life? And how do you know what that is?

Pray the opening prayer.

Opening Prayer

Creating God, who made the world out the empty darkness of chaos and created each of us in your image, work in us as we open your Holy Scripture and find ways to explore your Word together. Help us listen and share as we challenge each other to grow in faith and love in our time together. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Option B: Film Clips—*The Lion King*

The Lion King (1994, G) and movie-viewing equipment

Before the session, preview the following clips from *The Lion King*:

Clip 1: 1:03:00–1:08:00

Clip 2: 0:00–04:25

Introduce the first clip by telling the participants that the scene is from a movie about a young lion who takes a surprising journey to discover who he is. In this clip, a wise monkey leads him to a pond where he has a vision of his father reminding him of who he is and the job he has to do. Watch the first clip together and explore the following questions:



- When do you most need to be reminded of who you really are?
- How do you know who you are?
- How does your baptism give you a high calling, an identity, and a mission?

Watch the second clip, which shows the young lion being marked as the child of the king and shown to the gathered community. Explore the following questions:



- How is this scene similar to what happens in baptism?
- How are baptisms celebrated in your church? If you are baptized, what do you know about your baptism?
- How does baptism remind you of who you are?
- What does it mean to be a Christian? Is it a label, a way of life, both, or something else?
- What does God want you to do with your life? And how do you know what that is?

Pray the opening prayer.



Explore

Scripture and Faith Statement

- Bibles, copies of the Book of Confessions or "Session 1 Faith Statement" (Web Resource 1a)

Explain to the participants that the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written in the first century to Christian communities who were struggling to know who they were. Make sure each participant has a Bible. Read Matthew 3:13–17 and Luke 4:16–21 together. Explore the following questions together:



- How are these passages related? What is their common theme?
- According to these passages, what was Jesus' calling?
- What was the sign of his calling?

Read together Ephesians 4:4–7, 11–12, 16. Explain that Paul's letter to the Ephesians was circulated among many churches in Asia Minor (now the country of Turkey) about the same time as the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written and shared. Like the early Christian communities who were the audience of Matthew and Luke, the churches in Asia Minor wrestled with how to be a unified community with so much diversity, too. Explore the following questions together:



- How does the passage from Ephesians relate to the passages from Matthew and Luke?
- According to all three of these Scripture passages, what is our calling as followers of Jesus Christ?

Explain to the participants that the faith statement for this session comes from the mid-twentieth century and seeks to describe how our more contemporary forms of being the church help us participate in God's reconciling work in the world. Distribute copies of "Session 1 Faith Statement" (Web Resource 1a) or the *Book of Confessions*. Read the faith statement (section 9.51 from the Confession of 1967) together and explore the following questions:



- What does this faith statement teach us about our identity as followers of Jesus Christ?
- What does this faith statement say about our mission and our calling? Is it an individual or collective calling?
- How do the Scripture passages and the faith statement respond to the question "Why isn't belief in Jesus enough when you are a Christian?"



Express

Option A: Film Clip—*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*



Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005, PG-13) and movie-viewing equipment

Before the session, preview the following clip from *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: 31:30–38:45.

Introduce the film clip by telling the participants that the scene is from a movie about a teen wizard-in-training who receives an unexpected calling. In this scene, fourteen-year-old Harry Potter is inexplicably revealed as the fourth participant in a dangerous quest. Only three names are given each year, and participants must be seventeen. Watch the clip together and explore the following questions:



- How do you suppose Harry felt when he received this surprising call, especially in front of his peers and then his teachers?
- Harry has been summoned to an adventure that could very well be beyond his ability. What helped him say “yes” to the challenge and take the risk? What will help him through the journey?
- How could this situation be a parable about following God’s call?
- What would you do if you knew you wouldn’t fail? if you knew you would have enough money? if you knew you wouldn’t be made fun of?
- How might God call you to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free?

Option B: The Risky Adventure



A blindfold for each participant, a long piece of rope

Safety tips for this activity:



- Pay attention to safety concerns as you lead your group. People may be pulled too hard if the group isn’t moving together.
- Use the phrase “safety stop” to communicate safety issues. Participants can say the phrase if they experience a problem, and they need to stop immediately if they hear the phrase.
- Use the following chant to be sure each person is ready each time you begin to walk:

Leader: Walkers ready? *Group:* Ready!

Leader: Walking? *Group:* Walk on!

Have the participants stand in a line, facing forward with about 18 inches between each person. Place the rope on the ground parallel to the line of people. Have each participant put on a blindfold and grab the rope. Holding onto the front end of the rope, lead the blindfolded participants around the church and church grounds. If possible, include obstacles such as going up and down stairs, fitting through tight spaces (e.g., pews in the sanctuary), or crawling under a table. Conclude the walk in a place where you can gather to explore the following questions:



- What was it like not to know where you were going? How much risk was involved?
- Would the trip have been as interesting or fun if you had not been blindfolded? Would the trip have been as interesting or fun if you had known where we were ending up?
- How might this experience be like being a follower of Jesus Christ? How might this experience be like following God's call?
- How much risk is involved in facing your day each day? What do you need to face that adventure?
- What would you do if you knew you wouldn't fail? if you knew you would have enough money? if you knew you wouldn't be made fun of?

Option C: Video—“Called by Our Baptism”



“Called by Our Baptism” video

Before the session, obtain a copy of the video “Called by Our Baptism”:

- Download or stream the video from: pcusa.org/christianvocation
- Order the DVD from store.pcusa.org: Item #OGA07091

Watch “Called by Our Baptism” together and explore the following questions:



- What does it mean to “live out our baptismal identity”?
- How are all followers of Jesus Christ called to ministry?
- How has your baptism helped shape who you are today?
- How has your congregation helped you discover who God is calling you to be? How can your congregation continue to help you discover who God is calling you to be?



Exit

Option A: Vocation Graffiti Revisited

- Vocation Graffiti newsprint from Enter, Option A; markers; *optional*: newsprint

Closing Prayer

God, you call us and invite us into the greatest adventure we could ever hope for. In you we live and move and have our being, and we are safe in your love. You claimed us in our baptisms. Now you send us out to serve a hurting world, to bring good news, and to risk even hostile stares. Help us hear your voice and follow your lead with the hope, courage, and love you provide. Amen.

Invite the group to fill in other words, phrases, or drawings that help define the word *vocation* on the Vocation Graffiti newsprint created in Enter, Option A. If needed, start a new sheet of newsprint. Explore the following questions together:



- What has changed in our understanding of what *vocation* means?
- Who has a vocation? (*all of us*)
- What does our vocation entail? (*doing God's work in the world*)

Pray the closing prayer.

Option B: Sing Together “Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)”

- Copies of a songbook with “Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)” in it (such as *Sing the Faith* or *New Song Leader's Guide*, 2nd ed.); *optional*: musical instrument and instrumentalist or a recording of “Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)” and a music player

Sing together or listen to “Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)” (no. 2130 in *Sing the Faith* or pp. 344–345 in *New Song Leader's Guide*, 2nd ed.). Help the participants notice how the song invites them to respond to God's call and gives many examples of what that call might entail. Pray the closing prayer.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions that families can talk about after each of the four sessions in this course. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Worship Connections

Consider having the participants sing "Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)" (no. 2130 in *Sing the Faith* or pp. 344–345 in *New Song Leader's Guide*, 2nd ed.) in one of your congregation's upcoming worship services.

Film Connections

Nooma is a series of short films that explore our world through the teachings of Jesus. Purchase a DVD or download the film *Name* at nooma.com and watch it together. Discuss the film using the following questions:



- What shirts might you need to peel off to know who you are?
- When have you wrestled with someone or something in the night to discover who you are?
- What task has God given you in your life? Do you know yet? How might you discover it?
- Are you ready to be you? Are you ready for the adventure of God's high calling on your life?

The movie *Unbreakable* (2000, PG-13) tells the story of an ordinary man, David, who learns something extraordinary about himself after a devastating accident. The comic-book and supernatural overtones heighten the suspense the man feels as he tries to figure out who he is. Watch this film together at a movie night with participants and their parents or caregivers, and explore the following questions:



- How did David discover his identity? What was he called to do or to be?
- How did a community help him find out who he was and shape his identity?
- How did he know what he was supposed to do? How will he know how to live out his calling? How might you know how to live out your calling?
- What scenes in this movie particularly speak to you about what vocation is or how you might discover a calling?
- What aspects of a Christian vocation or calling do you see in David's newfound calling?

Profiles in Ministry

Invite your pastor or a seminary student to share the story of how he or she heard God's call to pastoral ministry. After hearing the story, invite the group to ask the following questions:



- How are you participating in God's work in the world?
- How did you hear God's call?
- How has responding to and following God's call changed you?

Take a Risk

Consider taking your group to do a high ropes course or to go rock climbing together where the youth belay the climb for each other. Before the experience, engage the participants in a discussion about the adventure of following God's call and the joy and risk involved. After the experience, debrief with the group members about the kinds of risks they took on the ropes course or climbing rock, how they supported one another, what risks they were able to take because of the group's help and support, and what they discovered and were able to summon in themselves. Discuss the kinds of social and spiritual risks they take on an everyday basis, and those that might be needed to respond to God's call. You might ask about comparisons that could be made between things such as safety lines or the challenge course and our spiritual lives.

Web Connections

Explore pcusa.org/christianvocation together to learn more about the PC(USA)'s Office of Vocation.



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