

Accept Jesus' Invitation

JOHN 1:6–9, 19–36; 1:35–51

GOAL

Adults explore the calling of Jesus' disciples and reflect on their own response to Jesus' invitation.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/c/GrowingFaithResources, for discussion starter videos.

PRAYER

Remind me, O God, that in my role as a leader, I am following your Son. The invitation to follow is yours. The privilege of discipleship is ours. May I follow your leading as I prepare to point others to Jesus' call to them. Amen.

THIS SESSION

All of the Gospels include stories about Jesus gathering his disciples and others to follow him. Some people receive direct invitation from Jesus; others respond to the witness and invitation of friends who themselves have chosen to follow Jesus. Those who choose to follow are not coerced or ordered to do so. They practice *following*—choosing again and again to accept Jesus' invitation to step alongside him and others in living the love and mission Jesus shows us.

THE BIBLE STORY

In this session, we approach Jesus' invitation to follow him through the opening chapter of John's Gospel. The gathering of Jesus' disciples in John 1:35–51 shows a variety of ways that those first followers came to Jesus. We also read about John the Baptist in John 1:6–9, 19–36, as he testifies to the truth of God and the coming of Jesus. John's testimony sets the stage for others to follow Jesus.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Invitation to Christian Worship” (p. 6): Gather printed copies of bulletins or orders of worship used in your congregation.
- “William Barber and the Poor People's Campaign” (p. 6): Preview the WNYC interview of Rev. William J. Barber II as he discusses his work with the Poor People's Campaign (bit.ly/FMWilliamBarberInterview, 20:14) and prepare to play the first seven minutes of the interview.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, AND PRAYER

Welcome participants and have people introduce themselves to the group. Distribute *Adult Reflection Guides* to participants and explain any particulars of your group meetings.

Begin the session by slightly adapting the litany on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Tell the group you will begin with the bold words “Jesus says,” and they continue, saying, “Come and see!” After each of those responses, read the question and allow a few moments of silence for people to reflect.

-
- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.



The practice of accepting Jesus’ invitation takes a lifetime because we are continually learning what Jesus’ mission is.

INVITATIONS

Invite participants to name different types of invitations, formal and informal, that they give or receive (e.g., weddings, graduations, birthday or retirement parties). Discuss:

- ➔ How are invitations received today? (e.g., *email, mail, social media, verbal, and so on*)
- ➔ What factors make you receptive to an invitation?
- ➔ What gets in the way of your accepting an invitation?

OPENING QUESTION

Direct attention to the first paragraph on page 6 that begins “Jesus invited all to follow him.” Briefly discuss, based on what the group knows about Jesus, what was different about Jesus’ invitation than those of other leaders of his time? Don’t worry about getting the right answer.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

INVITATION

Read John 1:35–51. Have participants identify the various ways people in this passage are invited or come to follow Jesus. Discuss:

- ➔ How does each of these people make an active choice to follow Jesus?
- ➔ What factors make them receptive to following?
- ➔ What factors might get in the way of their following?
- ➔ What is Jesus inviting his followers to? Why might people follow Jesus for this?
- ➔ How does this passage inform your understanding of following Jesus?

-
- Bible

TESTIMONY

Refer to “Testimony” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Highlight the observation that in the Black church the practice of *testimony* has two dimensions:

- Witnesses testify to the church and world about the actions of God.
- Witnesses tell God the truth about themselves and others.

Read John 1:6–9, 19–36. Invite participants to identify elements of John the Baptist’s ministry that exhibit these two types of testimony. Discuss some or all of these questions:

- ➔ How did John the Baptist’s testimony lay the groundwork for people to respond to the invitation to follow Jesus (shown in John 1:35–51)?
- ➔ How has the testimony of a person of faith influenced your choices or actions?
- ➔ What types of testimony have you made with your words or actions that influenced others?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

- Copies of your congregation’s bulletin or order of worship

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Distribute copies of your congregation’s worship bulletin or order of worship. Discuss the flow or rhythm of the service. Ask:

- ➔ How is your congregation’s worship an act of invitation?
- ➔ What elements of worship give people opportunities to accept Jesus’ invitation to come to him/to follow him?
- ➔ What elements of worship are acts of discipleship?
- ➔ How does regular, community worship strengthen your choice to follow Jesus?

- Internet-connected device
- Recording of WNYC’s William Barber interview (bit.ly/FMWilliamBarberInterview, 24:10)

WILLIAM BARBER AND THE POOR PEOPLE’S CAMPAIGN

Listen to the first seven minutes of a WNYC interview with Rev. William J. Barber II in which he lays out his sense of call to speak out and organize against intersecting moral injustices in the United States. Barber grounds his activism with the Poor People’s Campaign in his Christian faith and leadership. Following the interview clip, discuss:

- ➔ What does Barber say about the call on Christians to address these issues?
- ➔ What Scripture does he draw upon to support this work?
- ➔ What does Barber assert is moral about this work?
- ➔ What elements of Barber’s work testify to the love and mission of Jesus Christ?
- ➔ How does the work of the Poor People’s Campaign allow for people to follow Jesus?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

JOURNEY

If participants completed the suggested activity on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, invite volunteers to share insights they learned in reviewing their faith journey. Ask: How have you responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him?

TESTIMONY

Refer to "Testimony" on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to discuss their understanding of "giving testimony" or "testifying." Ask:

- ➔ What experiences have you had with giving testimony? What experiences have you witnessed around testifying to one's faith?
- ➔ How are these experiences related to an invitation to follow Jesus?
- ➔ What are the challenges and opportunities in today's world for testifying or giving testimony about Jesus?
- ➔ In what ways can you participate in testifying or giving testimony about Jesus? What message(s) about Jesus' love and mission would you include?

SAYING YES AND NO

Call attention to page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* where participants were invited to answer what we say yes and no to when we follow Christ. Discuss their responses.

FOLLOWING JESUS

Invite participants to offer one-sentence statements about what Jesus invites us to see and do.

Use the closing activity on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* to reflect on the following:

Jesus says, "Come and see!"

With God's grace, I will go.

Jesus says, "Follow me."

With God's grace, I will follow.

Amen.

Pens