



Following Jesus 3

LEARNING TO IMITATE

LEADER GUIDE

The purpose of this material is to help someone take their next spiritual step. It is not intended to be handed to someone to do on their own. Each session corresponds to a meeting where you discuss the material in a 1:1 or small group setting. The objective for each session is to help someone engage the Scripture and listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit by putting into practice what they learned.

EVERY MEETING SHOULD INCLUDE 4 COMPONENTS

Care → Learn → Apply → Share

CARE

Start each meeting by asking about their week and follow up on any takeaways or action steps from the previous week.

- What has been going well for you and do you have any stressors?
- This week I was praying for your _____. How's that been going? Anything else I can be praying for?
- Is there any way you were able to put what we discussed last week into practice?

LEARN

The second part of your meeting should be used to discuss the material by sharing answers about the passages and utilizing discussion questions at the end of each session. If they seemed to misunderstand something about the session, go through that Scripture passage and the corresponding questions together to clarify their understanding.

APPLY

Use the last part of your time together to help them get specific about putting their learning into practice. Make sure you pray for them and their action steps.

SHARE

Take time each session to ask about who else God has placed around them and what steps can be taken to:

- Share their story or the gospel
- Offer to help someone else take a next spiritual step

Following Jesus 3: **LEARNING TO IMITATE**

Introduction

Following Jesus starts with coming to Him, accepting Him as Savior, listening to Him, and doing what He says. Over time, the practice of being with Jesus and obeying Him takes root at a deeper level, and we learn to find our identity in Christ and model our lives after His. Imitating Christ goes beyond keeping a list of rules or checking off a to-do list. Imitating Him means adopting His attitude, mindset, and priorities. It means we copy His habits and the rhythms of His routine until we discover what it means to embody our faith. In other words, we become like Him as we adopt His way of life. (See Luke 6:40, Ephesians 5:1-2, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 3:1-3)

DISCUSS

- Describe what Jesus is like.
 - What formed your impressions of Him?
 - How have your thoughts changed over time?

- What comes to your mind when you think about “imitating” Jesus?
 - In what ways can people be like Jesus?
 - Are there things about Jesus that people can’t imitate?
 - Is there anything you don’t want to imitate? Why?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

Jesus did much of His teaching through metaphors, parables, and stories.

READ: Matthew 11:28-30
in The Message paraphrase

Discuss:

- What stood out to you from this passage?
- What did Jesus’ metaphor show you about Himself?
- What did it show about what it means to be His disciple?

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

Read the gospel of John, paying careful attention to everything Jesus did. For each incident make note of the following (creating a chart may help you):

- What Jesus did
- His attitude
- His motivation
- What people can imitate

KINGDOM MINDSET

Following Jesus is a lofty, noble goal, but the challenges of daily living seem more tangible and urgent. What's right in front of us takes priority in our attention. Becoming like Jesus requires that we learn to see all of life from His angle. Priorities get adjusted if we view current challenges in the context of God's grand design. When we operate from an eternal perspective we (like Jesus) can trade short term gratification for eternal satisfaction. The missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." That's a mind set on the Kingdom of God!

DISCUSS

What challenges of daily living currently occupy most of your attention?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

The Parable of the Talents
READ: Matthew 25:14-30

Discuss:

- What stood out to you from this parable?
- Who do you most identify with in the story and why?
- What does the passage show about imitating Jesus?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read each passage, below, make note of what you learn about a Kingdom Mindset:

- Matthew 16:24-26
- Acts 20:24
- Romans 8:18
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- Hebrews 11:32-12:3

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

Read Philippians, Paul's letter which reveals his kingdom mindset. It will help you to see the big picture of this book if you listen to it first in 2-3 different translations. Then, as you read, make note of anything you see that reflects an eternal perspective. What areas of life are impacted by this mindset? Compare this with a more typical view of life.

In your journal, process a current challenge of yours in light of eternal perspective.

- Ask yourself, what is my most pressing concern right now? What is it that makes this concern so heavy for me? Be as specific as you can.
- What is the deeper issue underlying this concern?
- Identify, from the Bible, what God's perspective on that issue is. You might consult a concordance or topical reference guide, or ask your discipler for suggestions. Choose one verse that seems particularly helpful and begin memorizing it.

When Jesus says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things..." (Matthew 25:21) what things do you want Him to mention?

- What do you believe are the "few things" Jesus has entrusted to you?
- Review Acts 20:24. Write a life-purpose statement for yourself.

As you've reflected, where would you say your mind has been set on things that won't last, more than on kingdom oriented things?

What personal spiritual practices might help you cultivate a kingdom mindset?

SELF-FORGETTING

Humility and selflessness are qualities of Jesus that His followers are called to imitate. Our common understanding of these terms is tinged with thoughts of low self-esteem or an inability to say “no.” But when we study the life of Christ, that is not what we see. He knew who He was (God!) but He didn’t cling to what was due to Him. Instead, He always said “yes” to His Father and prioritized the interests of others. It has been aptly said that, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” Jesus lived out that attitude in every way. Maybe we need a new term: “Self-forgetting.”

DISCUSS

Besides pride, what are some things that keep you thinking about yourself?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

Jesus Serves His Disciples

READ: John 13:1-17

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about this story?
- Who do you most identify with in the story and why?
- What does the passage show about imitating Jesus?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read each passage below, make note of what you learn about humility and selflessness:

- Matthew 20:20-28
- Philippians 2:1-5
- Colossians 3:12-13
- I Peter 4:10-11
- I Peter 5:5-7

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

You may have noticed that one term occurred frequently in the passages you explored with your discipler: Servant (or Serve). Humility and selflessness are demonstrated by servanthood. The Prophet Isaiah describes the Messiah as a Suffering Servant. Mark's gospel depicts Jesus as that Servant. Read the gospel of Mark:

Make note of the ways you see Jesus serving people or otherwise demonstrating humility.

- How did serving require Jesus to “deny himself”?
- How did the people He served respond?

Journal your responses to the following questions:

- When was the last time someone praised you? How did you respond?
- When was the last time someone criticized you? How did you respond?
- How do you react when your contribution or effort is not recognized?
- Who has permission to point out your errors and faults to you?
- When did you last seek forgiveness from another person?

Where do you see room for growth in how you embrace a posture of humility?

- What personal spiritual practices could train you to imitate Jesus, thinking of others more and yourself less?

WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

The idea of the Holy Spirit is difficult for many to understand, but New Testament writers make it clear that the Holy Spirit is crucial to our life in Christ, so we cannot ignore Him. Let us set aside our preconceptions and let the word of God be our guide, forming and reforming our ideas on this important topic.

DISCUSS

When you hear the term “Holy Spirit” what comes to mind?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

The Holy Spirit Comes
at Pentecost

READ: Acts 1:1-11 and
2:1-47

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about this story?
- Who do you most identify with in the story and why?
- What does the passage show about the person and work of the Holy Spirit?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read each passage below, make note of what you learn about the Holy Spirit and his role in the life of a Christian:

- John 14-16
- Romans 8:1-30
- 1 Corinthians 2
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:1-6

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

A discussion of the Holy Spirit gets right to the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity, which is mind blowing for many. A sermon by Timothy Keller offers a brief explanation to help clarify. *The Triune God - Gospel in Life*: <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-triune-god-4908/>

Take notes and consider:

- What stood out to you about Dr. Keller's teaching?
- What, if anything, makes you uncomfortable with the doctrine of the Trinity?
- What do you find confusing?
- What questions do you have? Make note of them. You may find answers as you explore on your own.

Read the book of Galatians and make note of everything you discover about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Journal your reflections:

- Summarize all your observations in one paragraph.
- How has this exercise challenged your past understanding of the Holy Spirit?
- What new insights or comfort do you gain?
- Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." What personal spiritual practices could help you keep in step with the Spirit?

MAKING DISCIPLES

For some reason, we typically think of making disciples as helping Christians grow in their faith. But the plain meaning of “make” is to create a new one of something. Making disciples starts with introducing people to Jesus so that they can follow Him; there is really no distinction, biblically, between evangelism and discipleship.

DISCUSS

- What qualifies someone to make disciples?
- What, if anything, is the difference between a Christian and a Disciple of Jesus?
- What is the distinction between teaching someone everything Jesus said, and teaching them to obey or observe everything he said? Which of these is typical of discipleship studies you are familiar with?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

Jesus and His First Disciples

READ: John 1:19-51

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about this story?
- Who do you most identify with in the story and why?
- What does the passage show about becoming a disciple of Jesus?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read each passage below, make note of what you learn about making disciples:

- Matthew 28:18-20
- 1 Corinthians 4:16-17, 11:1
- Ephesians 6:18-20
- Philippians 3:17
- 2 Timothy 2:2
- Hebrews 13:7-8,17

Discuss: What pattern of disciple-making emerges from these passages?

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

The book of Acts is sometimes called the Acts of the Apostles or the Acts of the Holy Spirit. In either case, it is the account of how Jesus' disciples, in the power of the Holy Spirit, carried out the Great Commission which Jesus gave them before He ascended to His Father. Read Acts:

- Make note of every time you see the gospel presented.
- How was it presented?
- How did people respond?
- What role did the Holy Spirit play?
- What life-change did people experience as a result of following Jesus?

Journal your reflections on the following:

The Bible includes lists of spiritual gifts, the fruit of the spirit and the flesh, etc.

- Why do you think it doesn't provide us with a list of spiritual practices to adopt?
- What spiritual practices have you adopted?
- How would you pass these practices along to someone else?
- What spiritual practices would you like to explore?
- What personal spiritual practices could help you cultivate a lifestyle of making disciples?

PRIORITIZING RELATIONSHIPS

Have you noticed that imitating Jesus is not about self improvement, or even becoming a more spiritual person (“Just me and Jesus”)? Jesus came on a mission and when He called disciples, He was inviting them to join Him on that mission. We’ve been talking for weeks about what that mission is, about the perspective, mindset, and power for that mission. But what about the method? Programs, curricula, even buildings are wonderful tools for ministry but Jesus didn’t use them in His ministry. Regardless of what tools we use, or don’t use, our ministry must hinge on being WITH people as Jesus was.

DISCUSS

- When you think about “ministry” what comes to your mind first? A place...a program...a preacher...?
- What do you find challenging about engaging in personal relationships with people?
- What is useful about creating spaces and programs for ministry?
- Are there any potential pitfalls you can think of?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

The Incarnation of Jesus

READ: John 1:1-18

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about this passage?
- What does the passage show about God/Jesus?
- Why do you think God became man in Jesus? Why couldn’t He save us from heaven?
- “Incarnation” means “in the flesh” or roughly, “with skin on”. Why is it important to have someone put skin on their faith so that you can see it, in the flesh?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read each passage below, make note of what you learn about the role of relationships in ministry:

- Mark 3:13-15
- Philippians 2:19-24
- Philemon

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

One definition says,

“Biblical Ministry is entering into purposeful relationships with people to help them grow spiritually.”

Such a ministry may be accomplished by seeking answers to three big questions:

1. Who are you personally?
2. Where are you spiritually?
3. How can I help you take the next step?

1 Thessalonians is a letter from Paul that demonstrates his very personal approach to ministry. Read 1 Thessalonians and note:

- How does Paul’s attitude reflect the definition above?
- What kinds of relationships does Paul mention in connection with his ministry?
- What emotional terms does he use?
- Considering the breadth of Paul’s ministry, this depth of connection must have been difficult. What do you imagine the cost would be for him?
- Why do you think intimate personal relationships were worth it to Paul?

Journal your responses to the following questions:

- Who has invested deeply in your life to help you grow spiritually? What did that look like? What did you gain that a sermon, or a class, or a book alone wouldn’t provide?
- What makes deep personal investment in people challenging?
- What personal spiritual practices could help you prioritize relationships in your ministry?

LEADING LIKE JESUS

The personal character qualities of someone who is following Jesus well are the qualifications Paul identifies for elders and deacons. Scripture is very clear about the kind of character God wants to grow in us. As we grow in spiritual maturity, we begin to act like and relate to others more like Jesus does. Our character becomes increasingly more important when we begin serving in greater capacities or we are considering roles of greater influence in the church. In the early church, men and women who were entrusted with this kind of servant-leadership were called “deacons” which is most easily translated as “servants”. Although certainly not perfect, these men and women were selected because they had godly character. This meant that they had a maturing faith that was evident in the way they lived and related with others, and that they found freedom from major areas of sin. In this session, we will look at one particular passage where Paul outlines these characteristics for leaders in the early church.

DISCUSS

Do you think some ministry responsibilities are spiritual while others are merely practical? Why or why not? Give specific examples.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

The First “Deacons”
Appointed
READ: Acts 6

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about this story?
- Who do you most identify with in the story and why?
- Does the ministry assignment of these men seem more practical or spiritual?
- What does the passage show about the qualifications of lay leaders in the church?

EXPLORE FURTHER

As you read the passages below, make note of what you learn about character qualities of church leaders. Does anything you see surprise or confuse you?

- 1 Timothy 3:1-13
- Titus 1:5-9

EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

This will likely take more than a week.

Spend some time assessing your own life in light of the qualities Paul outlines as qualification for church leadership. Take your time. Be prayerful and honest with yourself. Recognize no one is perfect and there will certainly be areas where you recognize you need to grow with the help of the Holy Spirit and members of your Church family. Also, keep in mind that areas where you experienced struggle or even failure in the past are part of your testimony of life-change!

1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money...

Worthy of Respect - This first requirement for the character of a servant leader acts like an umbrella over the entire list: deacons must be “dignified” or “worthy of respect”. This doesn’t mean you must be perfect; it signifies you must be humble, repentant and an example for others. The rest of the qualities we’ll explore will explain what “worthy of respect” looks like.

Part 1: First, we will look at sins we should be gaining victory over.

Not Double-Tongued - Being double-tongued means consciously saying one thing to one person (or one group)—and then saying or insinuating something else to a different person (or group). Because deacons are in the business of serving, they will have countless interactions with people who have problems, complaints, and who are dealing with genuine suffering. In these interactions, a servant must be compassionate while being sober minded and impartial about the issues. A double tongue indicates a fear of man, and a deacon who is driven by fear of man will be destructive to the unity of the Church. Later in this passage (verse 11) slandering is mentioned as well. Slander means speaking critically about someone in a way that doesn’t build them up but tears down their reputation.

How would you characterize your life in this area?

- Modeling
- Succeeding
- Average
- Struggling
- Failing

What would need to change in your life in order to experience greater victory in this area?

Not Addicted to Much Wine - Not only are servants to be self-controlled in their speech, they’re also to be self-controlled in their appetites. This standard prohibits drunkenness and also challenges any addiction that would enslave the servant’s heart or impair their judgment. The idea here is that they are controlled by the Holy Spirit, not a substance or an appetite. (Ephesians 5:18)

How would you characterize your life in this area?

- Modeling
- Succeeding
- Average
- Struggling
- Failing

What would need to change in your life in order to experience greater victory in this area?

Not Greedy for Dishonest Gain - Qualified deacons will control their speech, their appetites, and also their finances. The nature of ministry work will sometimes put you in contact with church funds. It will also put you in contact with people who have wealth, influence, or worldly authority who may wish to influence you through their favors. Paul warns against installing anyone known for being deceptive, cutting moral corners, or obsessing over money because of the temptation to use their ministry position for personal gain. (Significant consumer debt is often a sign of potential trouble in this area.)

How would you characterize your life in this area?

- Modeling
- Succeeding
- Average
- Struggling
- Failing

What would need to change in your life in order to experience greater freedom in this area?

Move Forward:

- Find a friend or mentor who loves Jesus and loves you to ask what they see when it comes to the above areas or any other potential areas of sin in your life. Give them the freedom to give you feedback about what they see. When they respond to you, don't defend yourself or make any excuses. Thank them for valuing you enough to give you honest feedback.
 - Based on what you've learned, is there anything you want to start doing or stop doing?
 - Who can help hold you accountable to these changes?
 - What personal spiritual practices could help you gain victory over the sin you are struggling with most?
-

Discuss with your discipler:

- What was it like to evaluate yourself?
- Sometimes it can be easy to fall into self condemnation when looking at your life closely. What can you do to remind yourself that you are not under condemnation (Romans 8:1) for any areas where you may be struggling?
- Where have you seen God's hand of transformation in your life up to this point?
- Who can help you grow in any areas of growth you identified?
- What can you do to invite accountability from that person?

Part 2: The qualities of a deacon (servant) are not limited to what they “don’t do”, but also include virtues that give evidence of spiritual maturity, and should be evident in someone who is given a role of servant-leadership in the church. These positive traits also fall under the umbrella of “Worthy of respect” found in verse 1 Timothy 3:8.

1 Timothy 3:9-13

9 holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. 11 Wives (women), likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. 12 Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. 13 For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Holds the Mystery of the Faith with a Clear Conscience - Although the primary responsibility for teaching and governing falls to the church’s elders—and their roles must not be confused—ministry leaders must also be growing in the knowledge of God’s Word and in articulating their faith. In fact, there will be plenty of instances in your work with people where the scripture you reflect on during the week will equip you to be an encouragement to a fellow follower of Jesus, or to share the gospel with someone far from God.

- What are you currently doing to grow in your knowledge of God’s Word and truths of scripture? Where would you like to grow?
 - Do you have a strategy for sharing the gospel? What is it? How has it gone using your strategy?
 - When was the last time you were able to share your story or the gospel with someone to the degree that they had the opportunity to say yes or no to Jesus?
 - What most often holds you back from sharing the gospel and what steps can you take to overcome these hurdles?
-

Tested and Proven - Paul isn’t explicit about the length or nature of the testing for a leader in the church. But what’s clear is that someone being considered for a position of ministry leadership should have some sort of proven track record or undergo a leadership consideration process. For many this may look like taking into account previous involvement in service. For others it may be sitting down with one or more church leaders to consider pertinent areas of character and experience.

- What are some ministry areas where you have served in the past?
- If possible, talk to a past ministry leader of yours. Would they say that you were...
 - Reliable
 - Hard-working
 - Open to instruction and correction
 - Cooperative with others in the ministry
- Are there any areas of concern you have in your ability to serve as a ministry leader?
- What are the areas of ministry service you hope to grow in? Do you have any ideas about how to take those steps? What equipping would you need?

Healthy Family Life - For a person's maturity to be truly authentic their character and habits of relating need to extend to their closest relationships. If they are married, they must love their spouse and be faithful to that person alone. If they have children, they must raise them in an atmosphere of gentle firmness and joyful love. Ironically this can be one of the most challenging areas for many potential ministry leaders.

- Ask your family how they feel about the possibility of you moving into a ministry leadership role.
 - Ask them in what ways you can improve in relating to them. Make sure you listen, don't defend, and thank them for their feedback.
 - (If you are not married or a parent, you may ask someone from your community group or a close friend the same questions.)
 - What did you learn from this conversation?
-

Discuss with your discipler:

- What stuck out to you most from this session and activities?
- What was encouraging about this session?
- Was there anything intimidating or difficult? If so, what?
- Where do you see God's hand of transformation in your life compared to when you first began to follow Jesus?
- What personal spiritual practice could help you grow in the virtues we explored?