A person in a black t-shirt and shorts is walking away from the camera on a dirt path that winds through rolling, arid hills. The sun is setting in the distance, creating a golden glow and long shadows across the landscape. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

YOUR

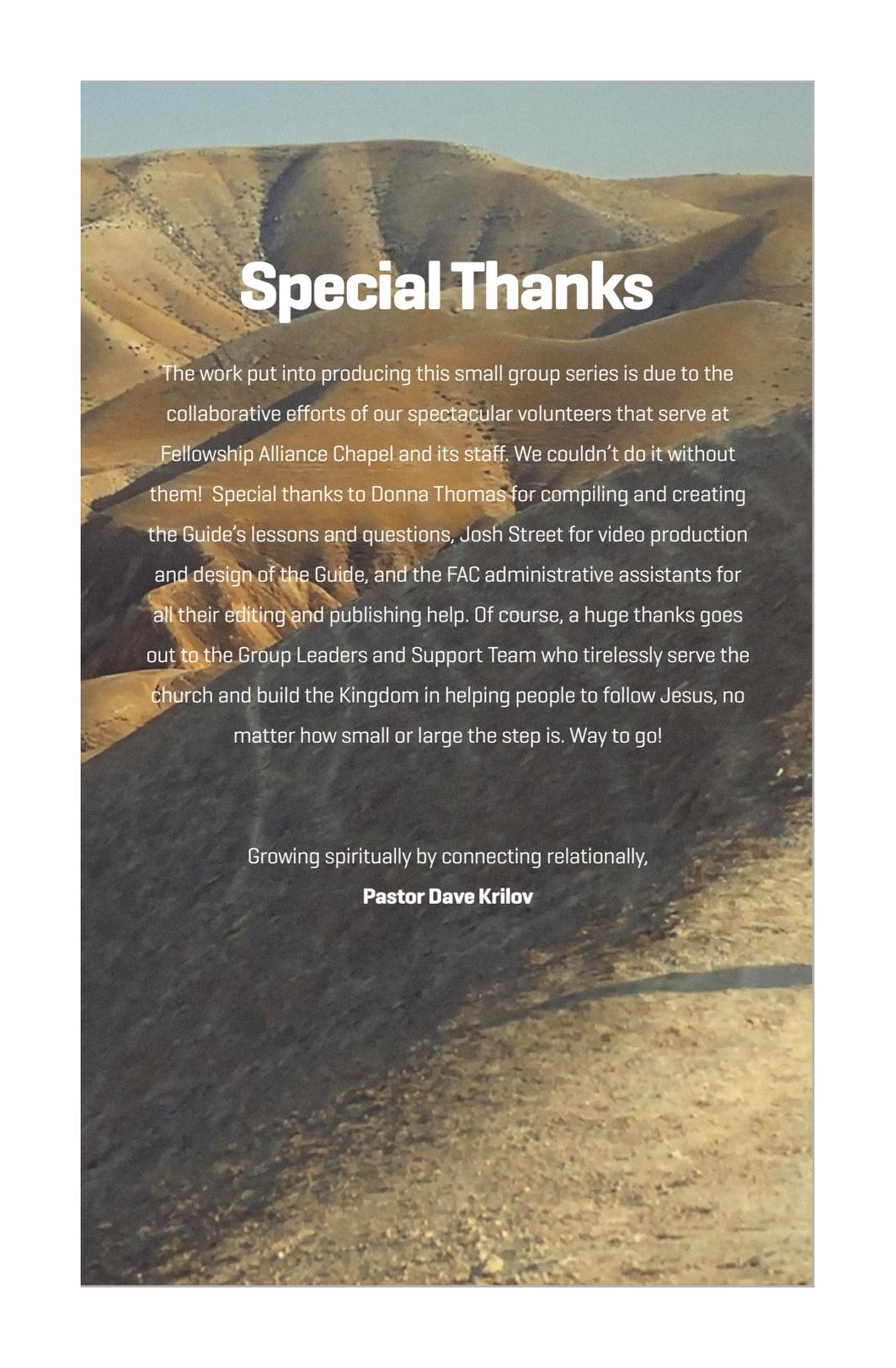
CHANCE

A Character Study on the 12 Disciples

Discussion Guide

Fellowship Alliance Chapel





Special Thanks

The work put into producing this small group series is due to the collaborative efforts of our spectacular volunteers that serve at Fellowship Alliance Chapel and its staff. We couldn't do it without them! Special thanks to Donna Thomas for compiling and creating the Guide's lessons and questions, Josh Street for video production and design of the Guide, and the FAC administrative assistants for all their editing and publishing help. Of course, a huge thanks goes out to the Group Leaders and Support Team who tirelessly serve the church and build the Kingdom in helping people to follow Jesus, no matter how small or large the step is. Way to go!

Growing spiritually by connecting relationally,

Pastor Dave Krilov

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What Can I Expect in a Small Group?	2
How to Use This Guide	3
Historical Context of the Original Twelve Disciples	4
Session 1 – Peter: Your Chance to Follow Jesus in Humility	6-7
Session 2 – Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Being Second	8-9
Session 3 – John: Your Chance to Follow Jesus through Love	10-11
Session 4 – Andrew: Your Chance to Follow Jesus from the Outer Circle	12-13
Session 5 – Philip: Your Chance to Follow Jesus in Tests of Faith	14-15
Session 6 – Nathanael Bartholomew: Your Chance to Follow Jesus, Motivated by Grace	16-18
Session 7 – Matthew: Your Chance to Follow Jesus Over Material Things	20-22
Session 8 – Thomas: Your Chance to Follow Jesus Even In Doubt	24-25
Session 9 – James, Simon, and Judas: Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Influencing Others	26-27
Session 10 – Judas Iscariot: Your Chance to Follow Jesus Away from Disaster	28-29
Session 11 – Matthias: Your Chance to Follow Jesus Faithfully	30-31
Session 12 – Paul: Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Answering God’s Call for Your Life	32-33
Your Next Step	34-35
Growing Spiritually : Transformation Marks that focus on the heart	35-37
Video Viewing Options	38-39



**LETS
GO!**

Introduction

Here is a strange fact: the first followers of Jesus didn't call themselves "Christians." The term was actually a derogatory term used by people outside the Jesus community. So, if the first Christians didn't call themselves Christians, what did they call themselves? Disciples.

Now, you might have heard of Jesus' 12 disciples, or followers. Basically, you had some guys who were busy at their jobs and all of a sudden, this guy whom they never met comes up to them, looks at them, and says "Follow me," and they follow. It all seemed kind of mysterious and unexplainable, but there's a lot more going on here.

You see, being a Rabbi, or teacher of the Law, in those times was an aspired position in the Jewish community. And every Rabbi had followers who would one day take the place of that Rabbi. But you couldn't simply "apply" to be a follower of a Rabbi. The Rabbi had to choose you. Typically, they chose the ones they thought would make the cut and were the best of the best, the A-Team or distinguished dozen.

Let that sink in. Jesus, who was considered a Rabbi, didn't choose the A-Team or distinguished dozen. He chose the B-Team, the dirty dozen. And He was going to transform them, change them, and make them the start of a worldwide movement. He didn't choose the best. He chose the willing.

So two questions for you to consider as we start this series:

1. Do you consider yourself a disciple of Jesus?
2. And, as we look at the disciples of Jesus, are you ready to learn what it means to follow Jesus in your life?

Here we go!

What Can I Expect in a Small Group?

To grow spiritually, you need to be connected relationally.

The way Jesus changes us is in the context of true fellowship with Him and one another. During your time together, you will explore how this is your chance to have an impact on the world around us, just as the twelve disciples did. To take part of this, we will look at what it means to follow Jesus as we observe the life of the disciples. You will also have time to get to know each other, pray for one another, and watch God work among you. And believe it or not, this will be fun! By the end of your time together we hope that you will know one another a lot better than you do now.

In order for you to get the most out of this series with your group we are asking you to do three things:



You will need to show up. It sounds obvious, but it is worth saying. In order for you to connect as a group, you need to spend time with one another. And that starts by showing up for the group meeting time.



You will need to join in. This means that you need to join in and participate in the discussion.



You will need to be real. These groups are meant to be a safe environment of grace. No one is perfect. Be who you really are.

If you can commit to these three things, there is no telling how God is going to speak to you and use you in the lives of others in your group.

How to Use this Guide

Each of the twelve sessions within this Guide follow the same format. This Guide was developed to fit into a two hour group meeting. Our suggested format is as follows:

Fellowship – 15 minutes

Use the first fifteen minutes of your group time for informal fellowship. Catch up on the events of the week and enjoy light refreshments together.

Video – 15 minutes

Open your time together with prayer. Watch the video session and take turns answering the video question posed at the end of the video.

Discussion – 45 minutes

Use the questions provided to lead a discussion centered around the topic of the session. Not every person has to answer each question. Allow for periods of silence so that people can process what they are learning. Silence also encourages the quieter participants to open up.

Prayer – 25 minutes

Close out your evening by sharing prayer requests and praying for one another.

The Historical Background of the Original Twelve Disciples

You could not ask for a more diverse group of men than the original Twelve Disciples. Half of them were fishermen. The other half were from very different cultural backgrounds. Each man was unique but each had a very specific, special job in the Kingdom of God. For the most part, these men were NOT what we would have expected. They were rough, uneducated, working men, self-serving, egocentric brash men. They had jealousies, jockeyed for position, and had trouble fully grasping who Jesus was and why He was here. They each had their own ideas of what Jesus should and should not do, how He should act, and what the Kingdom should look like.

But they walked with Jesus for three and a half years. They learned some hard lessons. Jesus never lost faith in them. He saw what they were but He also saw what they could become. By obeying His command to “follow,” they gave Jesus permission to mold them. And mold them He did – into men who would drop their nets, leave the tax collector’s booth, give up persecution of the church, and change the history of the world forever.

We have a lot to learn from them – still. And we can find ourselves, our personalities, our faults and flaws in each of them. They are us, and Jesus has called us out to follow Him.

It would seem that Jesus took a “chance” on this ragged group of men. But Jesus doesn’t take “chances” – He knew full well what they could become.

Jesus hasn’t taken a chance on us either. He knows exactly what we can and will be under His teachings. Instead of “taking a chance,” Jesus offers us a chance – a chance to follow in the footsteps of the original 12 disciples.

Will you accept this opportunity? Will you allow Him to mold you, teach you, train you? Will you follow our Lord and make disciples for His Kingdom?

The opportunity of a lifetime awaits. This is **your chance**.

*“ Salvation is free,
but discipleship costs
everything we have. ”*

Billy Graham



Session 1 : Peter

Your Chance to Follow Jesus in Humility

“ He said to them “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.
Matthew 16:15-16”

A tough-minded, impulsive man who learned how to lead out of humility.



READ: LUKE 5:1-11



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: What were your thoughts the first time you heard about Jesus?



DISCUSS:

1. Peter seems to be the leader of these fishermen. Suddenly Jesus appears, steps into Peter’s boat and tells him what to do. And then tells him how to fish! How do you think Peter felt about this? Circle all that apply and be prepared to defend your answers.

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| - Irritated | - Proud | - Ready to quit |
| - Reluctant | - Tired | - Defensive |
| - Humble | - Discouraged | - Happy |

2. What could Jesus have taught that day sitting in Peter’s boat that would have changed Peter? How does this story end? Was Jesus right about the fish? How does Peter respond? *[Luke 5:8]*

Petros vs. Petra: Petros is masculine in gender and means a small stone or pebble. Petra is feminine in gender and means a solid, immovable rock [think Gibraltar]. Reread Matthew 16:15-18 using these definitions. On what was Jesus going to build His church? Peter? Or Peter’s confession? See I Corinthians 10:4, Isaiah 28:16, and Ephesians 2:20.

Learning by Walking: Peter learns by walking side-by-side with Jesus, learning from what he saw and heard. But Peter is still Peter.

- A.** *In Matthew 15:15* – Peter demands an explanation for the parable.
- B.** *In Mark 8:32* – Peter confronts Jesus, actually “rebukes” Him.
- C.** *In Matthew 18:21* – Peter can’t seem to get the forgiveness thing and wants to know how many times.
- D.** *In Mark 10:28* – Peter wants to know “what’s in it for us?”
- E.** *In Matthew 26:33, 35* – Peter proudly announces he will never forsake Jesus. But he does.
- F.** *In Luke 22:31-32* – During confrontations, Jesus reverts to calling him Simon, not Peter. Simon is still full of himself.
- G.** *In Mark 14:37 and Matthew 26:40-41* – Peter can’t even stay awake for an hour.

3. Perhaps Peter’s lowest point is found in John 18:15-27. How humbling it was for Peter, who boldly proclaimed that he would never forsake Jesus days earlier, to hear that rooster crow and know what he had done. What would your counsel be to Peter in this situation if you were his friend?

4. After Jesus’ resurrection, He meets Peter in the very same spot, on the Galilean seashore where He first encountered him. And, once again, Jesus tells Peter to throw the nets on the right side of the boat. What was Peter’s reaction this time? [John 21:7-8] Is this the same old Peter? In what way has he changed?

5. What characteristics in Peter do you find in yourself? What can you learn from Peter’s life about being humble before God and others?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Through all of his faults, Peter’s intentions were probably honorable. But they weren’t Jesus’ intentions. Peter goes on to be one of the greatest witnesses for Christ and one of His most humble servants. No matter what your previous experience, Jesus can use you to serve Him. It may take time as in the case of Peter. Becoming a true follower of Jesus is a process of steps that doesn’t end until He takes us home or comes again. In the meantime, be patient. Wait humbly for the Lord. He is not silent. He will use you. This is your chance!

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Write down the names of three people you could serve by helping them with something [i.e. husband, wife, child, friend, neighbor, etc.] Make plans to serve them that meets their needs.

Session 2: James

Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Being Second



Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.



Philippians 2:3

A man who was first born into a prominent family and learned to be second.



READ: Matthew 10:2 and Luke 9:54



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: Why do we want to “beat others to the draw?” – to always be “first in line?”



DISCUSS:

1. The Bible always lists names in the order of importance. In Matthew 10:2, James is listed first, as the son of Zebedee, and John is listed as “his brother.” This indicates his position in the family – he was first from the time he was born. What struggles do you think could have existed between James and John since James was the firstborn?

2. Read Matthew 20:20-21. James’ mother had the audacity to ask if her two sons could sit at Jesus’ right (James) and left (John) hands when He ascended the throne in Israel. What kind of ideas do you think COULD HAVE been placed in James’ mind about his importance? What was Jesus’ response to them in v.22-23.

Which James?: There were other people named James in the Bible. There was the half-brother of Jesus – Galatians 1:19 – who wrote the book of James – James 1:1, and there was James, son of Alphaeus [Matthew 10:3, Acts 1:13] who may have been Matthew’s brother – Mark 2:14.

3. In v. 24, when the other disciples learned of their mother's request, they were livid. Describe a time when you wished you had thought to do something another was rewarded for?

4. Post-resurrection of Jesus, how do you think James' perspective on "being first" changed after knowing about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

5. Why is it difficult to be a servant-leader [i.e. at home, in business, at church, etc.] How can you be more of a servant-leader?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Acts 12:1-2 tells us that James died as a martyr "put to death with the sword" just five years after the church was born. It is believed James was the first martyr. While most of us will not be called on to make that great a sacrifice, what price are you willing to pay to be loyal to Jesus Christ? God is looking for dedicated people with natural leadership abilities who will become servant leaders. Look for ways this week to serve others in love, no matter what our earthly position. The greatest Leader of all was the greatest Servant of all. Look for ways to follow Him.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Think of the people closest to you. Write down three things you can say to them that would encourage them.

Session 3 : John

Your Chance to Follow Jesus through Love

“ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

A self-centered man who learned to love.



READ: JOHN 13:12-15; JOHN 19:25-27



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: How do you feel when someone loves and trusts you – in spite of your self-centered and even obnoxious behavior?



DISCUSS:

1. John was probably one of the youngest disciples. Some resources place him at 14-15 years old. What obstacles could he face at this age? Circle all that apply.

- Immaturity
- Exuberance
- Power hungry
- Self-centered
- Impressionable
- Energetic
- Quick to react
- Ignorance
- Insensitive
- Misunderstood

2. Read Mark 10:38-40. John was actually proud that they silenced a man who wasn't "part" of their group and did not expect Jesus to rebuke him.

a) What could have been behind John's motivation for sharing this with Jesus?

b) How is Jesus' words to John loving even though it was probably hard for him to hear it?

3. Why do many of us have difficulty believing that Jesus Christ loves us unconditionally?

4. John learned the difference true God-love could make. He went on to write I John nearly sixty years later and used “love one another” five times in his first letter [I John 3:11, 23; 4:27, 11-12]. In addition, he used the word “love” forty times. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” – I John 3:16. How hard is it for you to grasp the meaning of this love? What hinders you from accepting it? What hinders you from showing it to others?

Agape vs. phileo: Agape love is defined as unconditional love, God’s kind of love, that loves no matter what. Phileo love is defined as brotherly love, to be devoted as to a brother. John showed these two types of love in John 21:15-17. Read that passage using the following pattern: agape, phileo [v. 15]; agape, phileo [v. 16]; phileo, phileo [v. 17]. What did you learn?

5. How have you experienced Jesus Christ’s ongoing love in your own life?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Love is not just the feeling that takes our breath away, or makes us giggle as children, or makes us stop eating and doing school work when teenagers. It can be those things, but so much more. Love, true love, God’s kind of love is deep and sacrificial. It makes us care for others more than we care for ourselves. Love, true love, nailed Jesus to the cross. And a greater love brought Him out of the tomb to resurrection life. Meditate on this deeper love this week. Think about your relationships with your family and your brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about your relationship with Jesus. Think about the love Jesus has shown for you. No one has ever loved you like this before, since or in the future. Think about how much you mean to Jesus. Then praise Him for it!

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Think of the people in your life that you disagree with. Name something you can do for them that would show that you love them.

Session 4 : Andrew

Your Chance to Follow Jesus from the Outer Circle

“ He must increase, but I must decrease. ”
John 3:30

A man who found Jesus first but dwelt in the outer circle.



READ: JOHN 1:35-42



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: Why is it so hard to see everyone around you advancing in their career or in life, except for you?



DISCUSS:

- 1.** Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist [John 1:35, 40]. When John pointed out Jesus as the Messiah, Andrew believed immediately and ran to find his older brother, Peter. If you were in his shoes, who would you run to and tell?
- 2.** Though Andrew had met Jesus first, his brother, Peter, quickly took the reins of leadership. James and John were also brought into the inner circle. Andrew went from first to second, and then to fourth yet we read no sign of his being disgruntled. What could have kept Andrew motivated to serve faithfully, despite his “demotion”?

A Big Problem: In John 6:5-9, Jesus is faced with feeding over 5,000 people. Philip bristles at the thought and answers rather sarcastically. Andrew responds with a possible, yet seemingly inadequate solution. He had to believe beyond doubt that Jesus could multiply what little they had.

3. Can you identify with this statement about Andrew: “If he hadn’t been there, he would have been terribly missed. Yet, even though he was there, he often went unnoticed.”

a. Can you think of volunteers at FAC who would understand this statement?

b. Do you pray for them? Are you giving them words of encouragement?

c. Are you one of them?

If the most important thing is that God receives the glory, are you OK without the recognition, the praise, and the glory yourself?

4. Read Hebrews 6:10 – “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” What does this mean to you?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

This week, look around, be very observant of all the people it takes to make things happen at FAC. There are leaders, of course. But they can’t do it alone. Did you know that one ministry alone can have as many as 500 volunteers? How many people do you know who are faithfully operating behind the scenes, even though they are hardly noticed? If you are in a position to do so, what could you do to give them encouragement? How can you reward them for their faithfulness? And if you are one of those behind-the-scenes people, how is your attitude? Is knowing God sees all and rewards all who are faithful enough?

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Write down three people you know who are faithfully operating behind-the-scenes within our church body, and make a point to recognize and encourage them for their faithfulness.

Session 5 : Philip

Your Chance to Follow Jesus in Tests of Faith

“ Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ”

Luke 11:9

A pragmatic, rational man who became a true believer.



READ: JOHN 6:1-13



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: When was the last time Jesus provided you with a unique opportunity to grow in your faith?



DISCUSS:

1. In this story, it shows just how well Jesus knew the men He had chosen. He zeroed in on Philip and asked “where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” This was a test of Philip’s faith. Why do you think Jesus tests those that will be given a particular responsibility or task in life? Have you ever experienced such a test of faith? Please share if you can.

2. Philip responded to Jesus to what he thought was rational and logical, but it failed to take into account who he was talking to. Why is it important to remember who Jesus is when faced with a choice, decision, or test in life?

3. Jesus responds to Philip directly in John 14:8-11. Notice the last line: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” Another translation says “or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” What evidence do you have to prove that Jesus is not only God, but active in your life?

4. Doubts and questions are normal, even for true Christians, particularly at certain points in our lives. We are human. Have you ever experienced a period of doubt? If so, share when and why this happened and how you dealt with it.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.” – Deut. 4:29. “Call to me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.” – Jeremiah 33:3. This week, seek God with all your heart. He wants you to know Him – better than you have ever known anyone. And don’t be shy! He already knows everything about you. You can’t surprise Him!

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Take 30 minutes out of this week to get away and be alone to talk with God (go out in creation, a quiet non-distracting room, etc.). Take a Scripture passage from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), a pen, and something to write on.

Session 6 : Nathanael Bartholomew

Your Chance to Follow Jesus, Motivated by Grace



Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

John 1:51



A man who believed in his good works, but ended up trusting in God's grace.



READ: JOHN 1:43-50



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: Why is it possible to have a lot of religious knowledge, or do a lot of good Christian things, yet not truly understand the message of the Gospel?



DISCUSS:

1. Nathanael is standing under a fig tree when Philip approaches him with news of “the one Moses wrote about in the Law . . . Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” [1:45]. Nathanael, the skeptic, replies “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” At that time, Nazareth was a very immoral town as it was a stopping-off place for travelers and included brothels and the like. What things about Jesus make it hard to believe or trust him?

Nathanael or Bartholomew?: Matthew, Mark, and Luke used the name Bartholomew [Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13]. However, John used the name Nathanael – which means “God’s gift”.

2. Read John 1:43-50. To understand the interaction here between Jesus and Nathaniel requires doing a little bit of puzzle-piecing and knowing your Old Testament, as they would have. The key is when Jesus identifies Nathaniel as a “true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false”, and after Jesus replies to Nathaniel’s response of faith saying, “truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Jesus is referring to the story of Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28. The point of that story illustrated the fact that Jacob had a personal encounter with a holy and good God even though he was a sinful and dishonest man. It was all of God’s grace in moving toward Jacob, not Jacob moving toward God. We can safely assume that Jesus knew Nathaniel was thinking about these things and Nathaniel was startled that Jesus knew this when he said, here is a “true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false” and then later referring to the angels ascending and descending. Perhaps Nathaniel was resolving to be a good and honest man. While that is good, our good works can never be enough to earn God’s favor. We need a Savior that can be good on our behalf. While we may believe that it is only by Jesus good works and His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection that saves us, why is it easy to get caught up in thinking “God only will love or bless me if I’m good?”

Jacob’s dream: [Genesis 28] – 1. Jacob saw a ladder or stairway “resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven” – to the very presence of God.
2. It involved the “angels of God ascending and descending” – showing God’s accessibility and that He initiates direct contact with us.
3. And above the ladder “stood the Lord” [28:13] – God, in His loving grace, revealed Himself to Jacob, a sinner with a dishonest and deceptive heart.

3. The Gospel, [or good news about Jesus bringing the kingdom of God through his life, death and resurrection and fulfilling the promises made in the Old Testament] is a past, present, and future reality. What hope does this give you when you think about the Gospel as a past, present, and future reality?

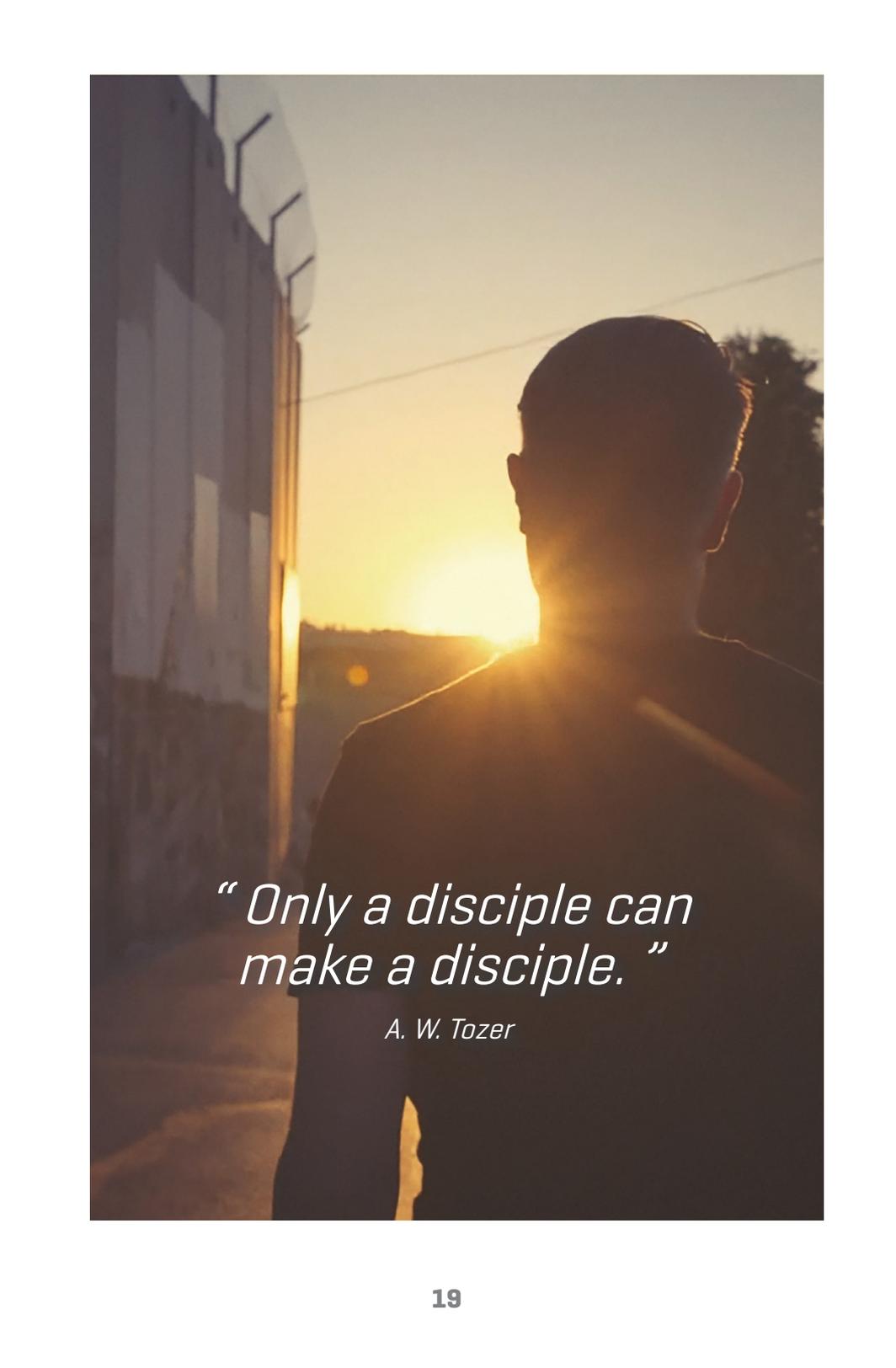
4. When all is said and done, what is the source of saving faith? [Romans 10:17, I Corinthians 12:3, Titus 1:1-3].

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Believe it or not, many people “in the church” do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. Sounds strange, doesn’t it? But for many, going to church is a good feeling. Helping with the children’s ministry is another good feeling. Giving to mission trips seems the right thing to do. Organizing prayer meetings, teaching Sunday school, being an usher, being on the finance committee or building committee, attending a mini church, even being an elder all makes us seem like we are faithful Christians. Jesus said the only thing that matters is belief in Him – having that personal relationship where He is truly your Lord and Savior. The rest of what we do is our response to His saving grace. This week, examine why you do what you do. If it isn’t out of overwhelming gratitude for the grace you have been given and if Jesus is not your best friend, run to Him. He is waiting with open arms!

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Write down a list of all the things you are grateful for God showing, doing, and saying of you. Count those blessings and thank God for them. Then confess to Him this prayer, “Thank you Lord for being so good to me even though I don’t deserve it. You are good to me, not because of anything good that I can do, but because of how good and gracious and merciful of a God you are. I see this clearly in Jesus and I look to Jesus as my Master and my Savior. In Jesus’ beautiful name, Amen.”

A silhouette of a person's head and shoulders is shown from behind, looking towards a bright sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. To the left, a tall, light-colored fence or wall is visible, partially obscuring the view of the sunset. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*“Only a disciple can
make a disciple.”*

A. W. Tozer

Session 7: Matthew

Your Chance to Follow Jesus Over Material Things

“ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ”

Matthew 6:33

A self-serving, rich man who found that it was all nothing, and that Jesus was everything.



READ: MATTHEW 9:9-12; 6:19-24



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: How can the love of material things and money be a hindrance in following Jesus?



DISCUSS:

1. Matthew was a tax collector. He was known publicly as a sinner, especially because he was a Jew who used the Roman government system to make money off of his fellow Jews. When Jesus called him to be a disciple, Matthew was sitting in a “tax collector’s booth” [Matthew 9:9]. Forgetting that you know the end of the story, would Matthew have been on your “disciples” list? Why or why not?

The Roman government: The Roman government was well known for dishonesty, underhandedness, and bribery. Matthew both served and used this system to his own advantage. As a tax collector, he aligned himself with men who cheated his own people. The tax collector’s job usually went to the highest bidder. This position had a built-in mechanism to take advantage of people and to get rich quick. Matthew did both. His toll booth was probably located on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee near the Syrian border on a heavily traveled trade route that came from Damascus. He collected taxes on imports and exports, including the fish caught by Peter, Andrew, James and John.

A New Name: Once again, following Jesus brought a new name. Before he became a follower of Christ, both Mark and Luke identified Matthew with the name “Levi” [Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27]. But when he became an apostle, they both used the name Matthew [Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15]. And when Matthew wrote about his own actions, he used this new name exclusively in his Gospel, even when he described his life as a tax collector [Matthew 9:9]. New lifestyle – new name? Matthew means “gift of Jehovah” – a fitting description of a true disciple of Jesus.

2. Matthew, in his gospel, records that Jesus said, “follow me” and he did. But first he threw a party – a “great banquet” – with a large crowd of tax collectors and sinners [Luke 5:29]. The Pharisees wouldn’t even go in! They stood outside questioning Jesus’ every move. What was Jesus’ response [vs.21-22] and how does this show you the love of God?

3. Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount about treasures on earth, and in heaven, and where your heart was. [Matthew 6:19-24]. He concludes with “no one can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve God and money.” Is Jesus referring to just money or does it include “stuff” – material possessions? How do we serve “money”? How can money and “stuff” control us?

4. Jesus wants all Christians to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The way we use our material possessions shows the health of our heart toward God and His mission. First Corinthians 16:1-2 encourages all followers of Jesus give regularly, systematically, and proportionately – as God has blessed them. In fact, at FAC you’ll often hear us say that we want everyone in our small groups to grow spiritually, connect relationally, AND serve missionally. We define “serving missionally” as serving on a ministry team, inviting friends and neighbors to services/events, and giving financially toward the mission of FAC. We never would force it, but we do believe it’s a biblical mark of being fully engaged with the mission God has called us all to. Why do so many Christians get uncomfortable when they are confronted with God’s principles of giving?

5. What has God taught you regarding the use of your material possessions and how does His love toward you motivate you to use your material possessions for Him?

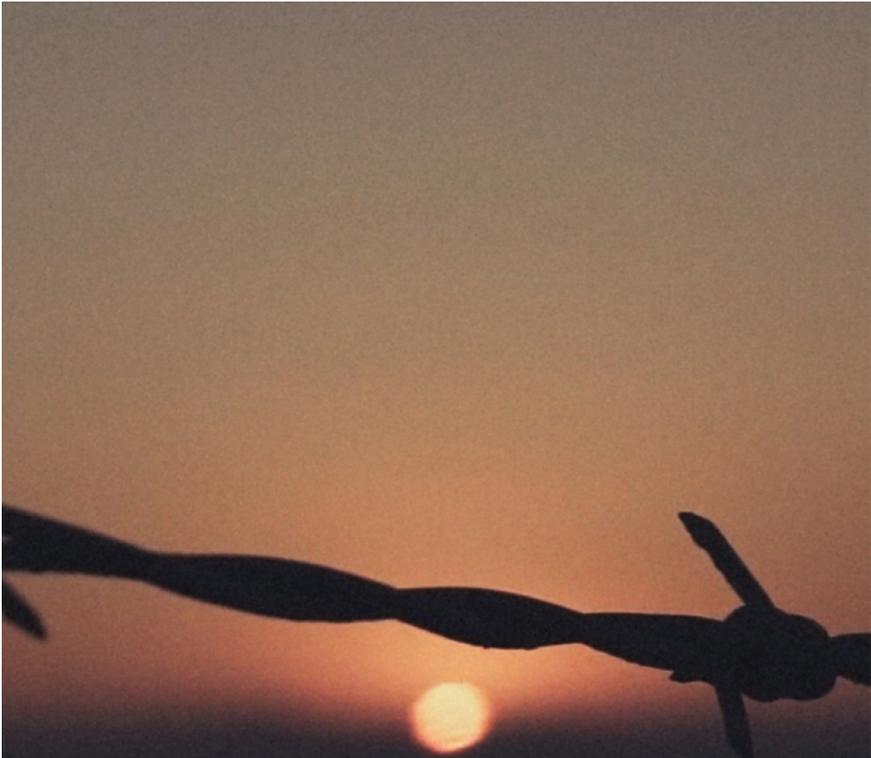
SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Read Matthew 6:19-24 again. Randy Alcorn, author of *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, says “Giving jump starts our relationship with God. It opens our fists so we can receive what God has for us... The more you give, the more comes back to you, because God is the greatest giver in the universe, and He won't let you out-give Him. Go ahead and try. See what happens.”

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

1. Make a list of all the things you spend money on. Then check those items that are obviously essential. Ask yourself if you could have met your needs by making more frugal financial decisions. 2. Mark an “X” by those items that are luxuries – those things you could live without. Total the amount spent each month on these luxuries. 3. Total up the amount you give to the Lord's work each month. Does it total at least 10 percent? Ten percent is not THE number to use, but it's a good start if you can. If not, how many luxuries would you need to remove in order to give at least ten percent? Are you willing to take this step?

NOTE: If giving is difficult, many have found that setting up a recurring giving amount online has helped them maintain the discipline of giving. See <https://www.myfac.org/giving/> to see how you can set this up.



“ We must assess our thoughts and beliefs and reckon whether they are moving us closer to conformity to Christ or farther away from it. ”

John Ortberg

Session 8 : Thomas

Your Chance to Follow Jesus even in Doubt

“ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. ”
John 14:6

A pessimistic, doubtful man, yet full of faith.



READ: JOHN 14:1-7; 20:24-29



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: How can doubt strengthen faith?



DISCUSS:

1. Thomas was a believer and true follower of Jesus. In John 11, Jesus prepares to go to Lazarus’ grave where there could be possible hostility. Thomas is afraid for Jesus’ safety but, if He is determined to go, declares “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” Is this faith or realism? “If He dies, we die.” Thomas was sincere, even though he was a pessimist in his personality. How does our personality sometimes make it difficult to follow Jesus?

A Twin?: Thomas is referred to as “Didymus” – which means the twin – in John 11:16 and 20:24. Some resources believe he could have been the twin of Matthew since their names are listed together “Thomas and Matthew the tax collector” in Matthew 10:3. Other resources indicate “twin” could refer to Thomas’ twin-mindedness – unbelief and faith.

2. Why is it often difficult for a someone who is intelligent, rational, and logical to come to the point of following Jesus?

3. Thomas is in the upper room with Jesus as they shared the Passover meal in John 14. Jesus once again speaks of the way to the place where He was going (John 14:4). Thomas is sincerely thinking this through. His sense of logic causes frustration and he asks the question all the disciples were thinking – “Lord,” he said, “we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” [14:5]. What if Thomas never asked this question? How is Thomas’ inquisitive nature a benefit to the other twelve?

4. Read Hebrews 6:10 – “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” What does this mean to you?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Since the original 12 disciples had their doubts, it should not surprise us when doubts arise in our spiritual life. Jesus said “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” [John 20:29]. Yet with all his doubt, Thomas comes to the truth with his confession “My Lord, and My God.” His faith was tested and strengthened.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Take a sheet of paper and make two columns. On one column write “Intellectual doubt” and on the other write “Emotional doubt.” Write down on the first column a list of all the doubts you’ve ever had about Jesus and the Bible that are more under the category of “intellectual” doubt [i.e. Where did evil come from? How did we get the Bible? etc.]. On the second column write a list of all the doubts that are more emotional in nature. These would be similar to the heart cries of the Psalmists in the lament psalms [i.e. Why can’t I sense you God? I feel like you’re rejecting me. Why are you letting these bad things happen to me?] Take your list and set out to use them to strengthen your faith in God by researching them in books and/or take them to someone you know can help you figure them out.*

***NOTE:** Alpha is a great place to start, as well as online at The Bible Project, www.thebibleproject.com

Session 9 : James, Simon, and Judas

Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Influencing Others



God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.



Hebrews 6:10

A pessimistic, doubtful man, yet full of faith.



READ: LUKE 6:12-16; JOHN 14:22



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: How do our lives influence others for better or for worse?



DISCUSS:

1. The only mention of these three men in Scripture is their first name. We know very little, if anything, about their personalities, occupations, or beliefs. How would you feel if at the end of your life on earth the only specific notation about you was your first name?

An Influence on Others: Mark 2:14 identifies Matthew as a “son of Alphaeus”. Could it be that James was the brother of the famous tax collector? This James was also identified as James the Younger or James the Less. If he was Matthew’s brother, certainly seeing his brother give up everything to follow Jesus would have a strong impact on James. It is possible his ministry in Syria founded the church there. Tradition has it he was stoned to death in Jerusalem for his belief in Jesus Christ.

2. Simon, the Zealot – by implication, was a member of a factious group in Palestine who were fanatically opposed to Roman rule and believed firmly that the land of Israel was a “holy land.” They recognized the Lord God and Him only as their king. How could this influence how Simon viewed Jesus and His mission? How would Jesus’ teachings differ from his zealous beliefs?

The Zealots: The Zealots were a powerful group known also as assassins. They took control of Jerusalem in A.D. 66, an action that eventually led to its destruction in A.D. 70 when Titus and his Roman army completely leveled and burned the city. Their last stronghold was Masada, a mountain fortress, which fell to Rome in May, A.D. 73. Before they were captured, most of them committed suicide rather than surrender to a pagan army.

3. Judas, Son of James – also known as Judas Thaddaeus – no doubt to keep him separate from that other “Judas”. Judas Thaddaeus is mentioned once in John 14:22 where he asks Jesus in the upper room why He was going to reveal Himself to them and not to the whole world. How would Jesus actually make Himself known to the whole world?

A Long Journey: It is believed that Judas, Son of James, traveled first to Egypt and then through North Africa to Carthage. From there he went to Spain and then north to Britain. He traveled with Simon, the Zealot and tradition tells us that both were martyred about A.D. 61.

4. Though little is written about these three men in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, we can be sure of one thing. They helped form the foundation of the church. It is proof that much can be done when we don’t care who gets the glory – or more precisely, when we care that only God gets the glory. They influenced others in a positive way. What kind of influence does your life reflect?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

God will not forget what we do to build His kingdom, even though few people know who we are. There are millions of Christians who have never preached a sermon, who have never written a book, and who have never appeared on radio or television and who may only be known by a few people. They have served God faithfully. Whether we realize it or not, people are watching us. What does your life show?

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Write down a few ideas of how you can get to know your neighbors. Inviting them over for dinner is always a simple and even biblical thing to do, when you think about how many dinner conversations occurred in Scripture! Just get to know them and have fun. When the time is right, invite them out to a weekend service or to a ministry event.

Session 10 : Judas Iscariot

Your Chance to Follow Jesus Away from Disaster

“ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

I Timothy 6:10

A covetous man whose life ended in disaster, but could have been avoided.



READ: JOHN 12:1-8; MATTHEW 27:1-10



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: Have you ever watched people disintegrate and ultimately destroy themselves, and you couldn't do anything about it? What choices did they make to lead them there?



DISCUSS:

1. What do we know or think motivated Judas to follow Jesus in the first place? Circle all that apply:

- Power
- Wealth
- Selfish ambition
- Prestige
- Money
- Possessions
- Position
- Greed
- Self-centeredness

Wealth and Money: Wealth and money are not evil. Lazarus and his sisters were wealthy people. Otherwise, how could they afford to have a single pint of perfume worth a year's wages? This family had money – lots of it – but they didn't LOVE it! They used what they had to support Jesus and further His kingdom. It is the love of money, the idolatry and worship of money, the extreme focus on money that deceives us. If you work exclusively for money, if you live to gain possessions, if your life consists of "what can I get for me?" – that is the evil and the wrong Master to serve.

2. Judas eventually realizes he has betrayed an innocent man and throws the money back at the Pharisees. He had a choice to turn to God or away. What keeps people from turning to God even when they feel guilty for the wrong they've done?

3. Judas' demise wasn't one that happened overnight, but was a slow fade of a series of choices that were made. Why do our choices matter in life?

4. Often, Peter's life is put in contrast with Judas. They both betrayed Jesus. However, Judas turns away from Jesus, while Peter turns to Jesus. Read John 21:15-17 with Jesus. How is Jesus re-affirming him and what picture does this give you about Jesus' character towards you and me, especially when we feel like we've disappointed Him?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

There will be times in our life when we think we have sinned so badly that God would never love us or accept us. You always have a choice and Jesus' forgiveness is both deep and wide! Don't be like Judas by turning away from Him. Be like Peter and turn to Him and His promises.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

When you feel burdened by your sin, try the following:

1. Read Psalm 51 and use the passage to confess your sin to God.
2. Read 1 John 1:9 and meditate on this promise. Remember the Gospel!
3. Read Philippians 3:12-14 and repent of your sin [i.e. turn away from the sin] and resolve to do the right thing next time. And when you are tempted to turn back to sin, interrupt the sinful habit with another activity.

Session 11 : Matthias

Your Chance to Follow Jesus Faithfully



For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.



Acts 1:22b

A man who followed Jesus who didn't expect anyone to notice.



READ: ACTS 1:21-22



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: What is hard about following Jesus when no one's looking?



DISCUSS:

1. Acts 1:21-22 states that the man the disciples chose to fill Judas' position was to be a man who had been with Jesus the whole time beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up to heaven. What had Matthias seen? What had he witnessed?

2. In Acts 1:15, Peter addresses a group of around 120 believers who had been gathered together, at Jesus' command, for prayer. Surely Matthias was there. He was always there – for three years – but not noticed or mentioned until Acts 1:23. Sometimes being in the background is a good thing. Sometimes it is not. What has been your experience with this?

Ready to Serve: Matthias had been a devoted disciple of Jesus for three and a half years. He traveled with Him, saw Him change water to wine, watched the Twelve put their faith in Him, eaten some of the loaves and fish that Jesus multiplied, saw Lazarus raised, people healed, the blind see, the lame walk. He was an apprentice disciple. Whatever happened, Matthias was going to be ready. Jesus had chosen the original Twelve Apostles [Acts 1:2] and now they prayed that Jesus would show them which of the two men He had chosen [1:24]. While Matthias could not have predicted the final outcome, Jesus could.

3. As we find in Scripture, God often tests a person in order to prepare them for a particular task or responsibility. Matthias could have faced some sort of test in life. We don't know as Scripture is silent on that part of his life. But think about your own life. How have certain tests or trials prepared you for a certain responsibility or position?

4. It is easy to think that we are wasting our time and no one notices what we do. But God knows everything we do! You cannot predict the next chapter of your life – what God has in store for you. Are you ready for whatever He calls you to? Can you be ready? How?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Matthias had been with Jesus for three and a half years listening, watching, learning, observing – not just Jesus, but the disciples, too. Like an apprentice, Matthias soaked it all in. He didn't criticize, complain about his position, or hold it against the Twelve that they got to be closer to Jesus. He just absorbed everything he could and trusted God to use it for His benefit. Ephesians 1:4 says "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." By trusting completely in God's timing, Matthias made himself available to God. Waiting patiently to see what God would do, Matthias did what he could to prepare. Faithfully doing his part, not caring when or where God called him, Matthias was ready. Are you? Do you have enough faith to wait on God? Are you open enough to His will? What will you do when God calls upon you?

Session 12 : Paul

Your Chance to Follow Jesus by Answering God's Call for Your Life

“ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

A self-righteous murderer who became a self-sacrificing missionary for Jesus.



READ: ACTS 9:1-22; I TIMOTHY 1:12-16



WATCH VIDEO / Video Question: How does your testimony of Jesus saving you relate to God's call on your life? Take time in this group session to share with each other your testimony of coming to Christ, if you feel comfortable.



DISCUSS:

- 1.** He orchestrated Stephen's death, was out to destroy the church, went from house to house dragging off men and women and putting them in prison for their belief in Jesus. Paul was obsessed with both his success and what he believed was God's will – a lethal combination. He was on his way to Damascus to take believers into custody and drag them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. Then “poof!” – he's a believer too! How likely would you have been to invite him into your small group?
- 2.** When Paul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus says, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Since Saul didn't know who Jesus was and Christ was already ascended to heaven, why would Jesus assume Saul was persecuting Him? [Acts: 9:4]

Years in the Making: Paul [Saul] grew up in Tarsus, a Gentile city. His early religious education was intensely Jewish but he was later educated in Greek culture and philosophy. He studied under Gamaliel, one of the greatest Jewish teachers who ever lived [Acts 5:33-40, 22:3]. Like Matthias, Paul was years in the making. His Old Testament studies and his familiarity with the Gentile world made him the perfect apostle for Jesus. He, perhaps better than any of the others, could prove beyond doubt that Jesus was the Son of God.

3. Paul immediately was baptized and began to preach. But it would take another seven or eight years before he was ready to actually carry out the task God had chosen him to fulfill. At Paul's conversion, he was on fire for the Lord – but God was still working in his life. What makes it hard to wait for God's calling on your life when you are so ready to move?

4. Paul went on to be a prolific church planter and wrote more New Testament letters than any other apostle – 13 in all. But Paul never forgot the grace and mercy he received from God on the road to Damascus.. Often calling himself the worst of sinners [1 Timothy 1:15]. Every follower of Jesus has a story to tell about Jesus' impact on their life and every follower is called to the mission of making other followers of Jesus. Using Paul's example in 1 Timothy 1:12-17, how can we share our testimony with others and take part in the mission of making other followers of Jesus?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Other than Judas, you couldn't have asked for a stranger, more unlikely apostle than Paul. But God had a plan. Paul became obedient to his Lord, even unto death. His writings teach us much about humility, faithfulness, forgiveness, serving and being faithful to a God who saved "a wretch like me." The only unforgiveable sin would be to reject the love and grace of our Lord. Don't let another day pass without taking advantage of all, ALL that God has to offer. He has prepared you for something. Find it, do it and praise Him for giving you the grace and strength.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Pray and ask God to give you an opportunity to share your testimony with someone this week.

Your Chance, Your Next Step **in following Jesus**

Any step toward Jesus, no matter how big or small, is a step to celebrate. We want to celebrate together as a church community what God is doing in us. This is why we've created a wall for you to participate in and mark your step in following Jesus. This could be anything that God has spoken to you about through this series and you are making a commitment to follow Jesus in whatever area in life that may be. It could be that you are going to love your spouse the way Jesus loves us. It could be that you are going to follow Jesus in speaking to your children in a different way. It could be that you are going to step out and forgive someone instead of holding on to bitterness. Or it could be the fact that you are taking your first step in following Jesus by trusting Him as your Lord and Savior. Whatever it is, let's celebrate together!

So, here's how to participate:

1. Go to the "Your Chance, Your Next Step" wall located in the Atrium.
2. Someone will be there to help you stamp a "footprint" with a stamp provided.
3. Stamp the wall with the footprint and write your name under the footprint to symbolize your step in following Jesus!

Growing Spiritually:

Transformation Marks that focus on the heart

We want people to grow spiritually, connect relationally and serve missionally [ministry, giving, & inviting]. These are great measurements, but some of our measurements with growing spiritually can be merely set on outer marks, such as: attends worship services, correct doctrine, serve in ministry, etc. These are all good things and important measurements, BUT it can't be merely all that is evaluated in your life. You can all do these things yet remain miserable, hateful, and judgmental of others. To get to those things is a matter of the heart. The heart is what Jesus came to transform; to truly love God and love others.

While not exhaustive, below are some good measurement marks of maturity that focuses on transformation of the heart.

Circle a number for each on a scale between 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 being high.

1. Rate your basic confidence and faith in God in all things.

- How confident are you that God's kingdom is alive and well?
- How confident are you in the reality that God is with you and for you in all your circumstances for good?
- Is this the fabric of your life from the time you wake up until you go to sleep? [This was Jesus' reality and He taught His disciples to have this same trust in His father.]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Rate your life witness as a fact [not words].

- How are you living? How are you known?
- Would people say you are loving, patient, caring, positive God trusting, winsome, not easily annoyed, able to be interrupted, critical, judgmental, suspicious, or hiding?
- How would your neighbor rate you? Your group members?
[Jesus' life/actions were a witness. And He taught His disciples to be witnesses as well]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Rate your life in the area of confident, expectant prayer.

- How is your connected, conversational life with God?
- Is there a habituated dynamic with Him that enables you to rest so that what you have given to Him is left with Him? Or what He asks of you is obeyed?
- Are you routinely confident in prayer?
[Jesus obviously prayed in such a way that His disciples asked Him to show them how to pray and He did.]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Rate your life as a conduit of God's power.

- Are you experiencing a power inside you that is real so that you can respond and see things with a kingdom vision and see how with God this can happen?
- Are you seeing the power of the kingdom expressed, lived out in your life?
[Jesus trained and sent out the 70]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Rate your level of freedom from worry, anxiety, and fear.

- Because you are following Jesus with your life, you experience the breaking of and decrease of habituated responses of worry, anxiety and fear, to life circumstances.

[Jesus taught His disciples to live without worry and instead to seek first His kingdom where worry is useless]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Rate your level of mercy and compassion for those in pain or suffering injustice.

- Do you routinely have a heart of mercy and compassion for others – not compulsion to fix things but a life that is compassionate and merciful - whether at work, home, play, or down-time? Not just in church.

[Jesus responded to people with compassion and mercy and taught His disciples to see needs around them. i.e. the harvest is plentiful, the laborers few - pray!]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Rate your committed participation and service to the body of Christ.

- Are you a servant to His body with Him as the Center – not you?

[Jesus leaves His disciples with the command to love one another as He has loved them and then He washes their feet leaving them an example of serving each other]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Video Viewing Options

OPTION 1: DVD

Each group leader will be provided with a standard definition DVD to watch the videos on a TV or laptop.

OPTION 2: VIMEO

All of the videos have been uploaded to the FAC Vimeo web page in 1080p high definition. There are two methods of watching via Vimeo.

Method 1: To view on Vimeo's website through a computer or mobile device, please follow these steps:

1. Go to: www.myfac.org/yourchance
2. Scroll to the bottom of the page where you will find links for each of the twelve video sessions.
3. Click a link for the desired session and you will be taken to the Vimeo website where you can watch the video.

Method 2: Vimeo provides an app to watch their videos compatible with most mobile devices, streaming players, and smart TVs. The Vimeo app can be downloaded through your devices app store or applicable interface. To find out more please visit: <https://vimeo.com/everywhere>

OPTION 3: DOWNLOAD MP4 SOURCE FILES

This option provides the highest quality viewing experience. It's available through any computer, mobile device, or smart TVs capable of playing downloaded MP4 files, either through a USB flash drive, network drive, or media player. To download the original source MP4 files, follow the steps listed below.

1. Go to: www.myfac.org/yourchance
2. Scroll to the bottom of the page where you will find links for each of the twelve video sessions.
3. Click a link for the desired session and you will be taken to the Vimeo website where you can watch the video.
4. Once you are on the Vimeo web page for the desired session's video, click on the button below the video titled "Download."
5. Then in the drop down box click on the link that appears titled "Original MP4 file." The MP4 file will automatically download to your hard-drive.
6. Once it has finished downloading you may then transfer that file to the device of your choice to watch on your TV in high quality 1080p resolution.



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