



Chapter I

The Call of a Disciple

UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)
Pages 4 - 15

DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)
Pages 16 - 26

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Come, Follow Me

Everything changed in Simon's life. When the day began, he was a Galilean fisherman. By the end of the day, he had left his fishing business behind and was following a wandering Rabbi around Israel. This simple fisherman had a "quit your job" moment, a "leave everything" moment, a moment that required profound trust, courage, and commitment. This was the moment Simon became a disciple.

Even if you've read the Gospels before, you may have missed the dramatic unfolding of Simon's call to discipleship. It is described in a few short verses (Luke 5:1-11). But don't let the length fool you—these verses are packed with deep truths about Christian discipleship. Answering Jesus' call to discipleship is absolutely life-altering. As we will see, that's how it was for Simon, and that's how it should be for us also.

Too often, however, we can think about following Christ in ways that are much too simplistic, in ways that don't reflect the depths of Jesus' call. We might think of Christian discipleship as accepting certain beliefs or loving our neighbor. Or we might think of discipleship as giving a little bit of our time to God, attending Church, spending some time in prayer, being a part of a Bible study, or doing some service

for the poor. These are all aspects of discipleship but being a disciple of Jesus consists of so much more. Discipleship is not a minor course correction, a sort of Christian adjustment to our behavior, but rather a total reorientation of our lives.

In Simon's story today, we are going to explore the true meaning of Christian discipleship. As we will see, Jesus makes a radical call, and Christian discipleship is a radical response.

Chosen (Luke 5:1-3)

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

There is a small detail we need to consider as we unpack Simon's call to discipleship. Did you catch it? How many boats were in this passage? Two. Of all the details that are included in the Gospel, and of the many things that are left out, why did the number of boats make it into the story?

This small detail reveals a simple, but important truth about Christian discipleship: Jesus chooses His disciples. There were two boats, and Jesus, theoretically, could have chosen one or the other. It wasn't an accident, a matter of happenstance that He entered Simon's boat. It wasn't simply that Simon's boat was the only one available. Christ's actions were deliberate and intentional. You can imagine Him walking to the shoreline, examining the boats, and then getting into Simon's.

In the back of His mind, He is aware of everything that is about to unfold. And, while Christ certainly also called James and John, who were using the other boat, sometime later, this passage reveals the unique way Jesus chose Simon.

At the beginning of this discussion of Christian discipleship, it is important to recognize the simple but profound reality that Jesus chooses His disciples. Jesus will say later in the Gospels, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16). Similarly, St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). None of us could ever deserve to be a disciple of Jesus. We don’t become disciples because we are really good people or because of some great quality or ability. Discipleship can only begin with the free and gratuitous gift of God. The Catechism states, “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life....He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him” (CCC 1). Everything else we will discuss about discipleship is built upon this foundation of God’s free and generous love for us.

Furthermore, every Christian is called to discipleship. Discipleship is not the privilege of a select few, a sort of advanced version of Christianity to which some are called but others are not. Each Christian is personally chosen to follow the Lord. Indeed, every Christian is called to a life of total, committed discipleship with Jesus.

Called into the Deep (Luke 5:4-7)

And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will

let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

Jesus calls Simon to discipleship in a very personal way. After going “out a little from the land” and teaching the crowd, (v. 3) Jesus says something surprising to Simon. He tells him, “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch” (v. 4). To understand this invitation, we need to consider the context. Simon is a fisherman. He has probably been fishing for his entire life. In other words, He knows how to catch fish. He knows that the best time to catch fish is often at night or in the early morning. In fact, as verse 2 tells us, he is just getting back from a night of fishing. He tells Jesus he “toiled all night and took nothing” (v. 5). What does this mean? Scripture is showing us that when Jesus makes his invitation to “put out into the deep,” he is asking Simon to go fishing at *exactly the wrong time*. You can imagine Simon thinking, “You want me to go fishing now?” What is Jesus doing?

Jesus’ request to “put out into the deep” isn’t primarily about helping Simon’s fishing business. He’s not proposing a new fishing strategy. Repeatedly in the Scriptures, God asks difficult, even seemingly impossible things of those He calls, in order to lead them to give their entire lives to Him. Abraham wasn’t simply called by God to have a child at age ninety-nine—as impressive as that would have been—but also to become a father of many nations, the father of all who have faith (Gen 12:1, Gen 21:5, CCC 145-147). Similarly, David, a young shepherd boy, wasn’t only invited to fight the giant Goliath but also to become king of God’s holy people, and ancestor of the great Messiah (1 Sam 17). Mary, the simple virgin from Nazareth, was asked to carry the Son of God in her womb and offer her life as a model of Christian discipleship, becoming the mother of all Christians and the Queen

of Heaven (Luke 1:31, Rev 12, CCC 967-970). In all these instances, God didn't only ask for something to be done; He sought a lifetime of fidelity. Therefore, when Jesus tells Simon to "put out into the deep," we observe a similar call. This is an invitation to trust, to surrender, to give his entire life—and it is filled with drama.¹

As we think about our call as Christian disciples, we shouldn't be surprised when we see this same kind of drama. In fact, we should expect Jesus' call to be surprising and challenging—it might even seem impossible at first. While Jesus might ask us to "put out a little from the land" initially, being a disciple means answering Jesus' call to "put out into the deep," trusting His plan for our entire lives, even beyond what we think comfortable, easy, or familiar. Like Simon, we might not fully understand what Jesus is doing, but instead of protesting, arguing, or being stubborn, as disciples, we are invited to say, "but at your word, I will let down the nets" (v. 5). Indeed, to be a disciple is to respond generously to Christ's call, to give all our life to Him, no matter how radical it might seem.

Simon's Response (Luke 5:8-10)

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men."

¹ The large catch of fish also prophetically anticipates Peter's mission as an Apostle. He will be called to lead the Church and be a "fisher of men," bringing an abundant catch of souls into his ship (the Church).

How would you respond to this miraculous catch of fish?

We wouldn't fault Simon if he offered Jesus some sort of fishing partnership. Isn't that what every fisherman would want? This was the catch of a lifetime. Why not celebrate and capitalize on the opportunity? Yet, we know from Simon's response that he sees something deeper in this miracle; it's about more than fishing. Jesus isn't revealing His fishing prowess to Simon. He's revealing His identity.

While we don't know exactly what Simon believes about Jesus at this point, we can see that he recognizes something more in this miracle. Instead of celebrating the catch of fish, Simon does something unexpected. He literally falls down at Jesus' knees and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 9). What would prompt such a strong response?

To help us understand, consider some background on Biblical discipleship. Theologian Edward Sri explains, "If there's one key word that sums up the essence of discipleship, it's *imitation*—imitating the life of the teacher."²

In biblical times, being called to follow a Rabbi as a disciple meant much more than joining a club or accepting a few particular teachings:

To follow a rabbi ... meant living with the rabbi, sharing life with him and taking part in the rabbi's whole way of life. A disciple might accompany a rabbi on all his daily routines: prayer, study, debating other rabbis, giving alms to the poor, burying the dead, going to

² Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 23.

court, etc. ... Disciples, therefore, studied not just the text of Scripture but also the “text” of the rabbi’s life.³

With this background in mind, we can begin to make sense of Simon’s response. If he understands the reality of Biblical discipleship, then he grasps the immensity of what is happening. He is being called to become a disciple of a great teacher (v. 3), a worker of miracles, a person whom he calls “Lord” (v. 9)—and Simon is being called to follow Him, to *imitate* him. This is truly an incredible invitation. No wonder Simon responds so dramatically. You can just imagine Him recalling his many shortcomings and inadequacies. Being face-to-face with Christ, he knows how incapable he is of imitation. He thinks there’s no way he could possibly follow this man. Yet, Christ still calls him.

Two thousand years later, Christ’s call to discipleship is no less compelling. Today, we know that Jesus is not simply another prophet or religious teacher; He is God-made-man. And amazingly, as disciples of Jesus, we too are invited to imitate Him. Pause, and think about that for a moment—Christian discipleship is an incredible, even radical, call to become like God!

Our Response: Three Temptations

Once we come to know the significance of Christian discipleship, it is important for us to personally consider how we are responding to Christ’s call. In particular, we need to be aware of three temptations that can prevent us from faithfully responding to Jesus.

³ Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 25.

The Temptation of Despair: First, we might be tempted to despair. Can I really live like Christ? Can I really imitate Him? How could I, as sinful as I am, possibly be like God? Like Simon, we might be fully aware of our many weaknesses, failures, and sins and might not believe that discipleship is possible for us. We might even think, “I’m just not the kind of person that can live like Jesus.”

In this situation, we need to be reminded that we don’t “qualify” for discipleship. Jesus doesn’t call us because he believes we are superior to others. He doesn’t call us because of our character. In fact, he doesn’t call us because of any of our qualities. He calls us because he knows what He can do in our lives. Jesus doesn’t call the equipped, he equips the called.

The Temptation of Pride: A second temptation in discipleship is equally problematic: trusting in ourselves. Upon hearing Jesus’ call, we might desire to respond generously. However, instead of listening to Christ and allowing Him to transform our hearts, we might try to live as faithful disciples by our own strength. Maybe we try to change a certain bad habit of sin. Or maybe we begin some apostolic work or service to the poor. But instead of entrusting these things to Christ, we try and accomplish them by our own strength and ingenuity.

Unfortunately, even with the best of intentions, these efforts will never be successful. We can’t live as faithful disciples on our own. Instead, we must embrace an essential spiritual principle, what St. John Paul II called the “primacy of grace”:

There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of

intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that “without Christ we can do nothing” (cf. Jn 15:5).⁴

The Temptation of Half-heartedness: Finally, we might be tempted to accept Jesus' invitation to discipleship, but only to a certain degree. We might see some attractive aspects of the Christian life and accept those, but then turn away when harder, more difficult teachings are presented. We might desire the blessings of following Jesus while avoiding the difficulties. This is a half-hearted response, and it isn't true discipleship. Being a disciple requires a whole-hearted commitment, not simply a half-hearted one. In the next section, we are going to discover what this whole-hearted commitment really looks like.

“They left everything and followed him” (Luke 5:11)

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

At the end of this passage, we read one simple closing line that is packed with meaning for Christian discipleship: “They left everything and followed him” (v. 11). These few short words capture the heart of discipleship. Let's consider them carefully.

Think back to the beginning of this passage. Recall what Simon was doing. When the day began, he was a Galilean fisherman. By the end of the day, he had left his nets and his boat behind and was following Jesus wherever He went. Therefore, when we read the words, “left everything,” let's not overlook their meaning. Simon had much to consider. He had many things that you or I might be tempted *not*

⁴John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, par. 38.

to leave behind. What were these things, and what does Simon's response tell us about discipleship?

The first thing that we can observe Simon leaving behind is his career. Fishing was his life's occupation. He probably started off as an apprentice. Then as he got older, he went into the fishing business on his own. Fishing wasn't just a hobby; it was Simon's whole livelihood. When we think of Simon leaving everything and following Jesus, we must recognize that he was giving up the one thing he had been working on for his entire adult career. And it wasn't as if Jesus showed Simon how discipleship was a better career path. He didn't promise Simon financial security or a retirement plan. He asked Simon to leave everything. This was, literally, a “quit your job” moment for Simon.

Simon also leaves behind his home and his community. We know from another passage later in the Gospel that Simon reminds Jesus that “we have left our homes and followed you” (Lk 18:28). Sometimes, we can be tempted to de-humanize the characters in the Bible, to view them as people that were somehow different than us. Simon was a real man, with a real job, with a real home. This isn't figurative speech. He left everything to become a disciple of Jesus.

As disciples, we too are called to leave everything. This might include sacrificing our career or a prestigious job, the safety and security of a comfortable modern lifestyle, our time and energy, the location that is most familiar to us, or simply our own plans and preferences. Whatever it might be that God is calling us to surrender, Simon's example teaches us that, as faithful disciples, we must be willing to leave it all behind for the sake of following Christ.

Finally, this passage ends with the words “followed him.” Again, these are a few simple words, but what did following Jesus really mean for Simon? Where did he go? How did he follow?

We know from the Scriptures that Simon followed Jesus throughout His public ministry. He followed Christ up the mount of Transfiguration and saw His glory. He followed Christ as He healed the sick and the dying. He even followed Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane, ready to go to battle for His cause. Simon’s discipleship, however, ultimately led him to the one place Christ had to go: the cross. That is where Christ’s life led, and that is where Simon had to follow. While Simon failed initially when he denied Jesus during his passion, tradition tells us that Simon (his name now changed to Peter) was eventually crucified in Rome, insisting that he be nailed to the cross upside-down, because he was unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord. In the end, this is what it meant for Simon to “follow Him.”

This is the key to Christian discipleship: discipleship means following Jesus everywhere He goes, even to the cross—in fact, most especially to the cross. In the Gospels, Jesus told His followers, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). The cross is at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Far too often, however, we fail to embrace the cross. When Jesus starts heading toward the cross, we start moving in the other direction. While Jesus certainly wants to heal us, forgive us, and allow us to experience joy and fulfillment, true happiness and joy come only through the cross. What is not crucified will not be resurrected. We can’t simply follow Christ when it feels good, when it suits our style, or when we encounter a problem and want Him to help. We must also follow Him when it is difficult, when we must make hard decisions, when others don’t understand—that is whole-hearted discipleship.

Life in Christ

In this Bible study, we are going to discuss the many habits of the Christian life, those aspects of “Life in Christ” that we are called to embrace as disciples. As we begin, we need to answer the most important question of all: am I willing to be a disciple of Jesus? As we saw above, discipleship is a profound reality. It requires answering Jesus’ call to put out “into the deep,” giving our entire lives to Him, leaving everything else behind, and following Him wherever he might lead—even to the cross. None of the other habits of discipleship in this study will make much difference if we are not first and foremost willing to embrace the call to discipleship. That is what the Christian life is all about, and that is where we must begin.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Passage: Luke 5:1-11

Introduction

1. Launching Question: What comes to mind when you hear the word “disciple”?

Allow the group to discuss.

Come, Follow Me

Please read aloud: An essential aspect of the mission of Jesus Christ – God-made-man – was the fact he called followers to himself, to live and learn alongside him. In other words, he made disciples. This Bible study will consider what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. How did he call disciples to himself? What did he teach them? And how should this inform how we live today, as Christians (or “little Christs”)? Today, we’ll look at the radicality of the Lord’s call to discipleship and the radicality of a whole-hearted response to him, as seen in the calling of St. Peter in Gospel of Luke.

Chosen

Read Luke 5:1-3

2. There’s a small detail here we should pay attention to. How many boats were in the water? And whose did he get into? Of all the details that are included in the Gospel, and of the many things that are left out, why do you think the number of boats made it into the story?

Answer: There were two boats, and Jesus, theoretically, could have chosen one or the other. It wasn’t an accident or a matter of happenstance that He entered Simon’s boat. It wasn’t simply that Simon’s boat was the only one available. Christ’s actions were deliberate and intentional. You can imagine Him walking to the shoreline, examining the boats, and then getting into Simon’s. In the back of His mind, He is aware of everything that is about to unfold. And, while Christ certainly also called James and John, who were using the other boat, sometime later, this passage reveals the unique way Jesus chose Simon.

Called into the Deep

Read Luke 5:4-7

3. Imagine this. You’re Simon. Fishing is your livelihood; this is how you keep food on your table and a roof over your head. You’ve been doing this for years – maybe even your whole life – and you know the ins-and-outs of fishing. You know the best time to catch fish is often at night and in the early morning. And you’ve labored *all* night and caught nothing. And now, as the day begins, you’re cleaning your nets, you’re signing off for the day, ready to take it

easy. How would you feel if Jesus came, got into your boat, and asked you to put your nets back in the water at this moment?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: Isn't this request rather inconvenient? Why might Simon comply? What is going on? Scripture is showing us that when Jesus makes his invitation to "put out into the deep," he is asking Simon to go fishing at exactly the wrong time. He's not proposing a new fishing strategy or concerned about helping Simon's business. He's proposing to him a seemingly impossible task, after Simon has toiled all night with nothing to show for it. We can see something similar in many other parts of Scripture: God often asks difficult, seemingly impossible things of those He calls.

4. Jesus is doing much more than helping Simon catch two boatloads of fish; why is Jesus asking Simon to do something seemingly impossible? Why would God do this for those he calls?

Answer: He is asking Simon to trust him. This is an invitation to trust, to surrender. Simon must have taken a step of trust and surrender in cooperating with this request from Jesus – like Abraham, David, and Mary did – even without a clear idea of what would be on the other side. While the Lord initially may ask us to take the risk of trust him in little things – "put out a little from the land" – eventually, and inevitably, he will ask us to trust him with everything, with our whole lives – "put out into the deep." He does not only ask us to cooperate with specific tasks – i.e., let down your nets – he is seeking for us to offer him our entire lives.

5. What do you think it would take for you to cooperate with a seemingly impossible thing asked of you by God?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: Jesus's call is radical. How does Simon respond? Let's keep reading.

Simon's Response

Read Luke 5:8-10

6. What is Simon's response to the catch of fish? Why do you think he'd react this way?

Allow the group to discuss. Answer: Instead of celebrating the catch of fish, Simon does something unexpected. He literally falls down at Jesus' knees and says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 9). What would prompt such a strong response? While we don't know exactly what Simon believes about Jesus at this point, we can see that he recognizes something more in this miracle.

Please read aloud: To help gain more understanding about Simon's response, let's consider some historical background on Biblical discipleship. Theologian Edward Sri explains, "If there's one key word that sums up the essence of discipleship, it's *imitation*—imitating the life of the teacher."¹

In biblical times, being called to follow a Rabbi as a disciple meant much more than joining a club or accepting some teachings: "To follow a rabbi ... meant living with the rabbi, sharing life with him

¹ Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 23.

and taking part in the rabbi's whole way of life. A disciple might accompany a rabbi on all his daily routines: prayer, study, debating other rabbis, giving alms to the poor, burying the dead, going to court, etc. ... Disciples, therefore, studied not just the text of Scripture but also the 'text' of the rabbi's life."²

7. A disciple of a rabbi is called to imitate him: his behaviors, his habits, his preaching, his whole life. At this point in time, what could Simon observe about this "Master," this rabbi? How does this help us understand his response?

Answer: By now, Simon would know that Christ is a great teacher (v. 3), a worker of miracles, a person whom he calls "Lord" (v. 9)—and Simon is being called to follow Him, to imitate him. This is truly an incredible invitation. No wonder Simon responds so dramatically. You can just imagine Him recalling his many shortcomings and inadequacies. Being face-to-face with Christ, he knows how incapable he is of imitation. He thinks there's no way he could possibly follow this man. Yet, Christ still calls him. With this background in mind, we can begin to make sense of Simon's response. If he understands the reality of Biblical discipleship, then he grasps the immensity of what is happening. The call to imitate is intimidating!

8. This is pretty amazing to think about. Simon is being called to be like – to imitate – not simply a great rabbi, but the Messiah who is God himself! But, God is a personal God who knows us intimately – not a distant, far off taskmaster. Let's look closely at his call for Simon; what images and language does the Lord use in his call to Simon? What does this reveal to us about our call to discipleship?

²Edward Sri, *Into His Likeness: Be Transformed as a Disciple* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 25.

Answer: Jesus calls Simon to discipleship in a very personal way. He not only approaches Simon on his "turf," but he also uses language to make his call compelling and meaningful to Simon based on Simon's life. "Let down your nets," "Put out into the deep," "You will be a fisher of men." Jesus calls us personally, too. While his call to imitate him will be challenging and life-altering, he comes to us as we are and invites us to follow him in a way that is suited specifically for each one of us. As intimidating as that is, we can rest assured knowing that the Lord calls us with an attentive care, knowing where we've been and where he desires us to go. His call is always particular, specifically tailored for each one of us.

9. How has Jesus called you personally? In what ways has he come to you in a personally compelling way, as he did with Simon?

Allow the group to discuss.

Our Response: Three Temptations

Please read aloud: When Christ comes to us and calls us personally to follow him, like Simon, we can face a couple of roadblocks that might prevent us from faithfully responding to him. We'll zoom in on a couple temptations we might experience, but first...

10. Can you identify some obstacles that could have stood in the way of Simon fully and faithfully answering Christ's call?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the Leader: As part of this discussion, be sure to mention three specific temptations listed below:

We've mentioned that we're called to imitate God himself! In response to this, we can be tempted to **despair**: Like Simon, we might be fully aware of our many weaknesses, failures, and sins and might not believe that discipleship is possible for us.

We've also mentioned that Jesus's call is radical, often coming to us as a challenge or terribly inconvenient compared with our plans. Another temptation is to be **half-hearted** in our response: We might see some attractive aspects of the Christian life and accept those, but then turn away when harder, more difficult teachings are presented. We might desire the blessings of following Jesus while avoiding the difficulties.

We've also pointed out that Jesus makes an intentional choice; it is not by accident that he calls his disciples. In light of this, we could be tempted to **pride**, trusting in our own strength, virtue, skill, rather than Him and his grace. But nothing will be fruitful if it is not rooted in the Lord (see John 15).

11. Does one (or more) of these temptations most closely align with your experience of following the Lord? How so?

Allow the group to discuss.

"They left everything and followed him"

Read Luke 5:11

12. Luke isn't exaggerating here. We know from the rest of the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of Saints Peter and Paul that Simon lived the rest of his life as a disciple of Jesus. So, what kinds of things did he leave behind in order to follow Christ from this point onward?

Answer: His career – his livelihood, his expertise, his security financially, socially, "professionally" – this was literally a "quit your job" moment. His home and community. We know from another passage later in the Gospel that Simon reminds Jesus that "we have left our homes and followed you" (Lk 18:28). Simon was a real man, with a real job, with a real home. This isn't figurative speech. He left everything to become a disciple of Jesus.

13. Does anyone happen to know what tradition tells us about Simon's death?

Answer: Simon (his name now changed to Peter) was eventually crucified in Rome, insisting that he be nailed to the cross upside-down, because he was unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord. Simon's discipleship ultimately led him to the one place Christ had to go: the cross. That is where Christ's life led, and that is where Simon had to follow.

Please read aloud: This last point is the key to Christian discipleship: discipleship means following Jesus everywhere He goes, even to the cross—in fact, most especially to the cross. In the Gospels, Jesus told His followers, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). The cross is at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Far too often, however, we fail to embrace the cross. When Jesus starts heading toward the cross, we start moving in the other direction. While Jesus certainly wants to heal us, forgive us, and bring us joy and fulfillment, true happiness and joy come only through the cross. What is not crucified will not be resurrected. We can't simply follow Christ when it feels good, when it suits our style, or when we encounter a problem and want Him to help. We must also follow Him when it is difficult and when others don't understand — this is whole-hearted discipleship.

14. To be a disciple is to respond generously to Christ's call. You, like Simon, are called to imitate the life of the Lord – which inevitably includes embracing your cross. How would you characterize your discipleship right now? Are you whole-heartedly saying “yes”? Are there things that are keeping you from “putting out into the deep” and “letting your nets down”? What “nets” do you think the Lord is asking you to leave behind so you can follow him freely? Are you willing to embrace the cross?

Allow the group to discuss.

Conclusion: Life in Christ

Please read aloud: Christ's call to you is radical. He is asking to you to come, follow him, imitate him, and take up your cross. But he always comes to you personally, intentionally, and supplies every grace necessary to be faithful to his call. The only true response to him is a whole-hearted response.

In this Bible study, we are going to discuss the many habits of the Christian life, those aspects of “Life in Christ” that we are called to

embrace as disciples. In each of the following chapters, we will discuss one foundational habit based on the teachings of Christ and the Church. As we begin, however, we need to answer the most important question of all: am I willing to be a disciple of Jesus? As we can see, discipleship is a profound reality. It requires giving our entire lives to Him, leaving everything else behind, and following Him wherever he might lead—even to the cross. None of the other habits of discipleship in this study will make much difference if we are not first and foremost willing to embrace the call to discipleship. That is what the Christian life is all about, and that is where we must begin.