



FOLLOWING JESUS

Week 4

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

- Matthew 9:9

Who is Jesus? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? If one says 'yes' to following, does anything change? Does a 'yes' impact individual lives? Communities? The world? Over the next six Sundays leading up to Easter, we are going to explore what the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – might teach us in response to these questions. With Jesus as our guide, we'll examine our own lives and the invitation each of us receives to be a follower.

This Lenten sermon series is designed for both Circle gatherings and for individual use as a daily Lenten devotional. As a Circle, when you gather you can walk through the daily readings or pick and choose readings and questions for your group conversations. As an individual, you'll find a Scripture, a devotional reflection, and a question for each day for your Lenten journey.

Following Jesus

MAR 14 LEAST & LAST

LUKE 1:14-20

(Parallels Disciple Bible Study Week 21: God Seeks the Least, the Last, the Lost.)

We like people who are like us. And we like to be at the front of the line, to finish in first, to be at the top of the class. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus challenges these human desires. He reaches out to those who aren't included, those with no power and status, those not like us, and he invites us to do the same. Then he challenges his followers and leaders of the faith community to turn over the social order of the world's ways that cater to the "haves" at the expense of the "have-nots".

Followers of Jesus embrace the least and last.

DAILY QUESTIONS

MAR 15-20 LEAST & LAST

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| Monday | Read Luke 4:1-13. What Scripture verse(s) can help you resist any selfish temptations that arise in your life? |
| Tuesday | Read Luke 5:12-16. If Jesus were here today in person, what groups of people, who have been oppressed or marginalized, would he seek out to show His followers the heart of God? |
| Wednesday | Read Luke 8:40-56. What or who might Jesus be calling you to notice in the world around you? |
| Thursday | Read Luke 14:15-23. How do the teachings of Jesus inform and challenge our societal norms and social networks today? |
| Friday | Read Luke 16:19-31. How do the teachings of Jesus challenge you in how you live and how you care for your neighbors? |
| Saturday | Read Luke 19:1-10. What are you doing in your life to seek and find a relationship with Jesus? |

FaithFit Lenten Challenge!

Spend 15 minutes each day this week in prayer and Bible study. Read the daily Scripture and devotion, answer the question for the day, and pray how you can answer the invitation of Jesus to follow and grow as a follower of Jesus.

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LEAST & LAST

SERMON ON MAR 14, 2021

Choose a question to get started!

- Who is someone who helped you through a difficult time, and what did he or she do to help?
- How would you describe what it feels like to be picked last or to finish last?

MONDAY

Read Luke 4:1-13.

What tempts you? Lots of times we'll answer this question with a food or drink, or something we do that isn't particularly healthy. Something like chocolate, or donuts, or coffee, or alcohol. The story of the temptation of Jesus, however, poses a question of what tempts you that lies beyond basic health choices. What has the power in your life to turn you away from God, or away from trusting Jesus with your life? Maybe the temptation of wealth? Or the temptation to let the fear of losing what you have guide your decisions? The temptation of accolades and success and what you're willing to do to be noticed and celebrated? The temptation of an addiction that you know is harming you or your relationships? In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has been fasting for 40 days when the devil comes to visit. If ever Jesus was experiencing the most basic challenge of being human, like you and me, this was one of those moments. And in the midst of his hunger and thirst, the devil offers Jesus three temptations. All three invite Jesus to put himself first - to use his power to serve his own interests, to put his trust in the devil and take the power and use it to his advantage, to believe he is deserving and privileged because of who he is. To all three temptations, do you know what Jesus does? He quotes Scripture. He resists the temptations by responding with what the Bible teaches about God as the true source of life and its blessings. So what tempts you? And in those moments of weakness, what Scripture verse might remind you to trust in God?

- What Scripture verse(s) can help you resist any selfish temptations that arise in your life?

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TUESDAY

Read Luke 5:12-16.

Have you ever felt left out? Have you ever had the experience where people judged you for something about you that wasn't within your control? For some, this isn't a one-time experience; it is a fact and way of life. A man with leprosy, a tax collector, a widow, a paralyzed man, a blind beggar, a Samaritan, a woman bleeding – all of these people who Jesus helped and healed were outcasts, without power or place in society. Those who were blind or paralyzed had no way to support themselves. Women bleeding or people with leprosy were forced to live alone or in poor colonies away from the general population. Tax collectors were despised for their occupation; Samaritans were hated for their culture and beliefs. Jesus reached out to all of them, providing not just healing, but restoration as wholly accepted people loved by God. So who are those who are living at the margins of society, without power or place in our social systems, today?

- **If Jesus were here today in person, what groups of people, who have been oppressed or marginalized, would he seek out to show His followers the heart of God?**

WEDNESDAY

Read Luke 8:40-56.

We get busy sometimes. Sure, the Spirit nudges us with a way we could help someone along our path, but sometimes we're too busy to sense the nudge, and sometimes we're too busy to follow where the Spirit is leading. Jesus could have kept walking. He had urgent business to attend to. He'd been asked to save a young girl from dying. So when the woman who was bleeding touched the hem of his garment and experienced immediate healing, he could have kept going. She was healed already. Peter told Jesus they couldn't find someone in this crowd. But Luke's Gospel includes this curious line, "Then the woman, seeing that she could *not go unnoticed*, came trembling and fell at his feet" (NIV, *emphasis added*). The woman was in a crowd. She could have gone unnoticed by any normal person. But not Jesus. Jesus noticed her. Jesus paid

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attention to her. To the world she was an outcast with a bleeding disorder that made her unclean and unfit to live around others. To Jesus, she was a child of God who mattered and should be included! Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." By her act of faith, the woman claimed her place in God's family. And in that family, she now knew that she couldn't go unnoticed by Jesus.

- **What or who might Jesus be calling you to notice in the world around you?**

THURSDAY

Read Luke 14:1-14.

A few years ago I attended a class reunion. Twenty-five years had passed, and we still knew our seating assignments. The former athletes and cheerleaders were at their table. The former party goers were at their table. The former, and mostly still, farm families were at their table. The socially awkward and once excluded couple walked in and were almost at a table by themselves when someone from the farm families table grabbed a chair and made them feel welcome. Some progress, I was glad to see. We read the story of Jesus at the house of a Pharisee for dinner, and see the rigid social ranking and order represented there, and think this was just life in the first century. But the truth is, social distinctions still matter today. To these social networks, named and unnamed, Jesus speaks of reversing expectations and introducing a new way to structure society. This social system, Jesus says, honors humility and servanthood. This social system, Jesus says, honors the least and the last. This social system, Jesus says, subverts human social systems that reward the "haves" and disadvantage the "have-nots." This social system, what we often call the kingdom of God, is marked by radical inclusion where no one is left out.

- **How do the teachings of Jesus inform and challenge our societal norms and social networks today?**

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FRIDAY

Read Luke 16:19-31.

When we teach our kids what it means to love people as Jesus did, we often use an example like sitting next to the person who is alone in the lunchroom at school, or standing up for a kid who is being gossiped about or bullied, or including the child who everyone else avoids. But what does this look like as adults? Is it just giving money to a food pantry or charity? Is it reading some books to be aware of those who are oppressed, or suffering, or alone? The truth is, the lunchrooms of our childhood, where some are not welcome at tables, may be harder to see as adults but are no less real. We want to help the homeless but don't want them living in our neighborhoods. We want everyone to be cared for and included, but we're uncomfortable with those not like us and don't go out of our way to invite them into our social groups. We want every child to have a chance, but those with resources move out of struggling school districts and leave the struggling there with fewer resources. We want equality, but not at the expense of changes in our society and our own lifestyles. Luke tells us the beggar, Lazarus, lived at the gate of the rich man. The rich man must have passed him every day, could have invited him in for a meal, but seems to have done nothing to alleviate his suffering, creating what Jesus describes as a "chasm" between them (NIV). What is the meaning in this parable for you? For us?

- **How do the teachings of Jesus challenge you in how you live and how you care for your neighbors?**

SATURDAY

Read Luke 19:1-10.

For those who grew up in the church, the story of Zacchaeus was a Sunday School staple told with a song. "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he," the song says, before going on to relay that he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus pass by. If you know this story, you also may know the ending that says after meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus gave away half of all he had and repaid anyone he had cheated four times what they'd lost. But there is more to this

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story. Just before meeting Zacchaeus, Jesus tells his followers how a tax collector who repents is justified while a religious man who holds up his religiosity while judging the sinner is not. And then, in response to a rich man who wants to know how to inherit eternal life but isn't willing to part with his wealth, Jesus says it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter God's kingdom. Now into the story enters Zacchaeus, a very rich man. Zacchaeus goes out of his way to see Jesus, and then, when Jesus is challenged for going to be a dinner guest in his home, Zacchaeus says, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much" (Common English Bible translation). Note, Zacchaeus doesn't say that he will do this after meeting Jesus. He uses the present tense. This very well may be an ongoing practice for Zacchaeus. The teachings of Jesus become real in this encounter, in this moment with Zacchaeus. A rich person cannot earn or pay his way into God's kingdom, or earn his or her way into eternal life. But what is impossible for him, is possible for God, for Jesus. Zacchaeus, like the lost son in another parable Jesus told his followers, is looking for God in Jesus, desires to be found again. And Jesus says to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household..."

- **What are you doing in your life to seek and find a relationship with Jesus?**