

Between the Stories

A Small Group Discipleship Resource

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered what the disciples talked about between the stories we read in Scripture? Have you thought about the fact that the disciples were ordinary people? Have you ever considered the struggles they may have had understanding some of Jesus' teachings? As we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, we sometimes forget that life with His original twelve disciples continued day to day between the stories recorded.

And so it is with us. As present-day disciples of Jesus, it is our day-to-day lives that actually prepare us for what we often call our "wow" experiences. Our time in God's Word, our time with fellow disciples, and our time in prayer open our ears, hearts, and minds to the reality that living as a disciple of Jesus is an ongoing immensely enriching, yet costly venture.

Between the Stories is specifically designed to follow completion of the NALC Life to Life Discipleship manual and to be used in a small group setting. At New Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Hickory, NC, we use the 15-session NALC Life to Life Discipleship manual to provide a solid introduction, integrating discipleship and disciple-making into every area of life. Small groups that form during that time continue meeting after completing the manual. Discussion similar to what is offered in *Between the Stories* often ensues, encouraging participants to walk alongside Jesus' original disciples as they read His teachings and live as present-day disciples.

In addition to discipleship groups, the contemporary language used by the disciples in this resource has been shown to be an accessible invitation to seekers. Also, the creative, down-to-earth depiction of the disciples provides a

way to engage youth as they see the disciples of old struggling with some of the same faith issues they are facing. Finally, this resource offers a refreshing perspective of the Twelve for those who already know them and love their stories.

A stark commonality between the disciples of old and present-day disciples is rooted in the importance of establishing and living in relationship with others. Disciples develop a deeply intimate relationship with Jesus, while at the same time, developing close relationships with other disciples. These relationships strengthen us to enter relationships with those we disciple and encourage us to live out our role as disciples and disciple-makers in every aspect of our daily lives! Truly the life-long call to living as Jesus' disciple is impossible in isolation. We need each other.

Each session of this resource consists of a Scriptural passage, imagined dialogue, discussion questions, and a section for specific connection and application to daily life.

Regular participation in a small group was modeled by Jesus' original Twelve and remains to be essential today. At New Jerusalem, discipleship small groups typically meet weekly for participants to:

- 1) Catch up with each other on life over the past week;
- 2) Share discipling opportunities they've had over the past week;
- 3) Pray together;
- 4) Share insights and challenges from daily time in God's Word; and
- 5) Study Scripture together.

Between the Stories is a collection of imagined dialogues that various groups of Jesus' original twelve disciples, along with the women who followed Him, could have had after experiencing some of His teachings.

These imagined dialogues are designed to encourage present-day disciples to tap into their inner dialogues as they read Scripture, and to support each other in embracing the radical life of surrender that Jesus requires of His followers.

The dialogues presented in this resource typically address Jesus' disciples anonymously, leaving their names up to the reader's imagination. The often referred to journalist, however, would most likely be Matthew or John, and by reading the Gospel accounts of these two men, it is fairly easy for the reader to determine which of the two is likely being referenced (if it matters!).

Between the Stories addresses the "now what" question that surfaces after completing the Life to Life Discipleship manual. As we journey together, we begin to grasp the truth that discipleship is not a course, a class, or a program. Discipleship is not something we can fit into our busy lives. Indeed, lived-out discipleship actually becomes the vehicle that drives all areas of our

lives, and is dependent solely on God's power.

An interesting note about ***Between the Stories*** is that the disciples who have completed the Life to Life Discipleship manual at New Jerusalem are the ones who have inspired development of this resource. Many comments, questions, and emotions expressed in the imagined dialogues of old are actually parts of conversations present-day disciples at New Jerusalem have had with each other.

Hopefully this imagined glimpse back in time encourages you, the reader, to embrace your time between the stories, as you dialogue, listen, learn, and walk with fellow disciples.

- "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23)
- "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)



If any of you wants to be my follower,
you must give up your own way, take
up your cross daily, and follow me.
Luke 9:23

Session 1

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?!

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 9:57-62; 10:1-4

⁵⁷ As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

⁵⁹ He said to another person, "Come, follow me." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." ⁶⁰ But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family." ⁶² But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."

¹ The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. ² These were his instructions to them: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. ³ Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴ Don't take any money with you, nor a traveler's bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don't stop to greet anyone on the road."

IMAGINE A CONVERSATION AMONG THE DISCIPLES

"Man!" exclaims the last to get through the doorway. "What a day this has been! Just when I think I know what Jesus is about to do, He comes up with something totally outside the realm of possible thinking!"

"Sometimes I wonder if He gets a kick out surprising us," another muses.

Gazing at nothing, slowly shaking his head, one of the men wonders aloud, "What's the deal with the 72 brand new followers He sent out on a major witness mission?!"

"I thought it was 70," another chimes in.

"No, I distinctly heard 72," someone calls out.

"Well," interrupts the disciple whose constant journaling was often viewed by some of the others as irritating, "I wrote down what He said, and it was 72."

Irritated, the previous disciple continues, "70 ... 72 ... I really don't care! That's not the point. Jesus called them to follow, then bam ... out they go! Talk about naïve! They have no idea what's ahead of them or how to do what they need to do!"

In agreement another chuckles, "Did you catch the interchange between Jesus and those

two guys who said they wanted to follow ... then actually asked Jesus to wait while they took care of 'important' personal business?!"

"That's exactly what I'm talking about. They had no idea at all who they were talking to! All of us knew how that was going to go down before Jesus uttered a word of response."

"Yep," one interjects. "For all His compassion, Jesus draws definite lines about what it takes to be His follower."

Impatiently a familiar voice booms, "OK, that's settled. Now, can we please get back to what I was saying? What I'm concerned about is whether or not those 70 ... or," glancing over to the journalist, "72 untrained men can do the job. We've been with Him for quite a while now, and today when things are winding down after a long busy day, He calls and sends out a bunch of newbies!"

One of the more reserved disciples speaks up, "True, but did you hear what He told them?!"

Pulling out his writing pad, a familiar voice offers, "Yes, I wrote down every word He said. I'll read it to you."

Coming to his feet and speaking with irritation, the impatient one interrupts, "Would you just stop it?! We don't need anything read to us. I'm trying to get some input on something important here." Waving to the others he continues, "And all of you keep steering the conversation in another direction. I'm trying to make a point about these newbies' qualifications. Did any of you hear the part about the wolves?"

Again, the reserved disciple speaks up, "Brother, you've got an awful lot of energy around this. Have you forgotten what it was like when He sent us out!!!! No money, no food, no extra clothes? We complained to Him about not being qualified, and we grumbled with each other about who He paired us up with. We were scared out of our minds when He told us to heal the sick and cast out demons!"

"Finally someone is talking some sense," chimes in one of the women. "I'm actually glad He didn't send the twelve of you out again ... yet I'm a bit curious about what He has in mind for you while the new followers are out traipsing around the countryside."

"I agree," one of the other women asserts. "We need to be praying not only for those He sent out, but also for those He kept here. We have no idea what Jesus will ask us to do next. We do know, however, that the opposition is everywhere. I think Jesus' warning about the wolves was meant for all of us."

Heavy silence fills the small room.

Letting out an audible sigh and nodding in agreement, someone finally speaks, "Seriously! How could we have forgotten that journey!? We even argued with Jesus about what we thought we needed to take with us, having no clue what we were about to experience!"

"That was the point," adds another. "We had to totally trust. Even though we felt like our ordinary selves, He gave us a huge responsibility – and a generous dose of extraordinary power that scared us to death to even think about using. Do you remember how surprised we were when we allowed that power to flow through us?! We actually did heal the sick, and we saw demons flee. You know, I'm getting excited about hearing the stories the new followers will have when they get back."

Another who had been quietly listening poses, "Have you thought about this – Because we have been doing what He tells us to do, there are now 70 more for Him to send out! Think how many followers there will be when they get back!"

"Man! That takes me to my knees!" blurts out one of the men. "Why are we so reluctant to do what He tells us to do? Why do we complain and offer our suggestions as other possibilities – like He doesn't know what He is doing?!!!"

"Who would ever have thought that He

would choose, empower, and equip someone like me ... or,” chuckling, “like any of the rest of you?”

With a bit of concern in his voice, he adds, “Yeah, one thing I know about the seemingly unpredictable way Jesus works, is that we can predict that He’s got something in store for us – and

that His plan won’t change based on whether or not we understand – or like – what’s going on!”

“You got that right, brother,” adds the disciple who began this conversation. “We best be getting ready. I have no doubt that another discipling challenge is on its way!”

SESSION 1 - DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions below are intended for personal reflection and group discussion.

1. As you gather in your small group and re-read the Scripture passage above, note words or phrases that catch your attention.
2. With which parts of the imagined conversation do you most closely relate?
3. Re-read Luke 9:23. In what part(s) of the dialogue do you recognize the disciples’ struggle with stepping outside of themselves in order to do something for others?
 - a) Look at specific examples, and in your small group, notice the disciple’s attitude of serving self. What are the effects of his attitude on some of the others?
 - b) How could he have denied self (“given up his own way”) at this point, while still being able to gain clarification on the issue that was bothering him?
 - c) After identifying several examples in this dialogue, discuss with each other the relevance this awareness has on your personal life as a disciple.
4. To what do you attribute the disciples’ motivation for moving forward in obedience at times when they don’t understand (or like) what is going on?

5. Write down the specific emotions you can identify from the disciples' words and/or actions.
6. Which of those emotions are familiar to you in your life as a disciple?
7. As you read Luke 9:23 in light of the Scripture focus of this session, what can you identify as a daily cross that both the disciples of old and present-day disciples need to take up?
8. What do you recognize as a positive outcome from the disciples' coming together to share their experience of the day?
9. How would you answer the question that titles this session ("What's going on here?!") as it relates to your discipleship journey?

LIFE TO LIFE CONNECTION

Choose ONE of the following areas of life: Faith, Priorities, Relationships with Friends and Family, Marriage, Parenting, Finances, Health & Wellness, Boundaries, Servant Leadership.

- A. Write a statement that describes your current reality in that area.
- B. Based on the Scripture passage for this session, write a statement describing where you believe God might be nudging you to grow or change in that area.
- C. Share your process and the statements you wrote with your small group.
- D. Pray for guidance and clarity before identifying steps to take in order to move toward what you believe to be God's vision and stay accountable to your group as you take those steps.