

GROW

LEARNING TO
FOLLOW JESUS





GROW

LEARNING TO
FOLLOW JESUS



INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING JESUS

Did you know there's a party going on in heaven right now because of you? The Bible says that when someone decides to follow Jesus, a celebration breaks out in heaven (Luke 15:10). Whether you're completely new to Christian faith—or newly coming alive to faith as a re-committed Christian—welcome home to the family!

There is so much joy in beginning a journey of following Jesus—so much to discover, experience, and learn. We do not do this alone; faith is a team effort.

Growing as a follower of Jesus happens in vibrant and dynamic ways over time.

DISCIPLESHIP VISION:

GROWING DISCIPLES IN LIKE & WITH CHRIST

- You grow **in Christ** as you grow in intimacy and identity as a beloved child of God.
- You grow to be more **like Christ** as your passions, energies, and interests are transformed by his love.
- You grow **with Christ** as you join him in his mission to bring other people into his good kingdom of justice, mercy, and compassion.

As we follow Jesus, we experience healthy growth in all three of these dimensions.

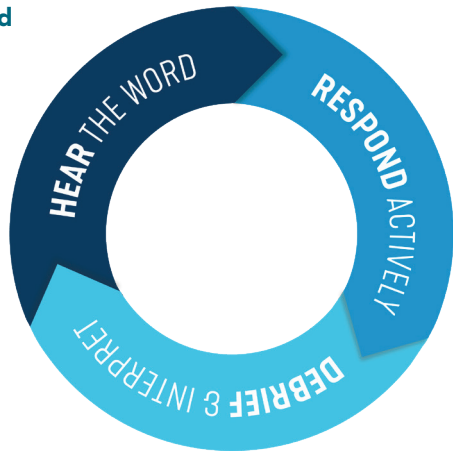
INTRODUCTION

HOW WE GROW

How do we grow as disciples of Christ? Take a look at the discipleship cycle in the diagram below. What does it mean to you? Have you ever been involved in anything like this?

While each person's story of growth will be as unique as an individual fingerprint, the process at work within all of our stories is remarkably similar.

- At some point, we **Hear the Word** of God given to us in the Bible: we study, or pray, or listen to a message at church, or talk with a friend.
- For growth to happen we do something more than just hear; we **Respond Actively** and specifically to the words we hear.
- We also **Debrief and Interpret** so that we can learn from what we experience as we Hear and Respond.



Discipleship Cycle

For the next four weeks, and for the rest of your life, you will focus on this vision and living out this growth cycle.

► RESPOND ACTIVELY

All this growth happens best as you become part of a community of other followers of Jesus—in a church or Bible study or campus fellowship. As you check out this guide for spiritual growth, you will need a friend or mentor to help you get the most out of each of the four studies.

Think about who you can ask to partner with you in these days of new beginnings.

Remember: There is a party going on in heaven in your honor! Celebrate, because the journey of following Jesus is the adventure of a lifetime.

GROW
IN CHRIST, LIKE CHRIST, & WITH CHRIST

WEEK 1-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

YOUR NEW IDENTITY

As you begin your journey of following Jesus, this Bible study will help you reflect on your new identity in Christ and how God is working in your life.

CELEBRATE!

When you responded to the invitation to follow Jesus, what did that mean for you?

What insights or questions do you have about your new life in Christ?



HEAR THE WORD

Matthew 4:17-22. From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."** At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Discuss: What stands out to you about this story?

The message Jesus preached began with a call to repent. The word repent means "to turn around; to change direction entirely." We might say, "to make a 180-degree turn." What associations do you have with the word repent? What does it mean for you to repent?

What is Jesus asking of Peter and Andrew? What is he offering them?

Why do you think the fishermen left their nets and boat "at once" to follow Jesus?

This is a story about change in identity. Describe their old identity and their new identity. What do the nets and the boat represent to the fishermen?

What might your nets and boat be? What might it mean for you to leave your nets and boat behind as you become a fully-committed follower of Jesus? Ask God to show you.

WEEK 1-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS
YOUR NEW IDENTITY

Pray: Thank you, Jesus, for this invitation to follow you. I'm excited to follow you because:



Listen: Take time to listen to God for a response to your prayer.

► **RESPOND ACTIVELY**

In our fast-paced, digital culture, writing in a journal can be a helpful way to reflect on your life, faith, and growth. Take time this week to journal as a way of recording how God is working in your life. Use the journal page provided at the end of this booklet, or a journal of your own. Schedule time to journal right now and create a reminder for yourself.

Like the disciples were changed by meeting Jesus, write down what happened when you responded to God's invitation.

As you journal, reflect on the questions from the Bible passage and consider how you will respond to what God is showing you.

►► **STRETCH GOAL**

Your faith is not confined to just you and God. Faith is a team effort and you need other Christians in your life.

As Simon Peter and Andrew discovered how to "fish for people," so we too can invite others to join Jesus in his mission. Who are two people you can invite to follow Jesus and begin exploring a new identity as his disciple?

Please text them right now to meet with you this week.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD & OTHERS

In Week 1, you learned more about what it means to fully follow Jesus and your new identity in Christ. Reflect on the following review questions.

DEBRIEF & INTERPRET

Last week you tried a journaling exercise to record your questions, experiences or reflections. How was the journaling experience for you? What did you like, or not like, about the practice?

If you met with someone to help you in your faith journey, what did you learn?

Do you have any new questions or insights about what it means to be a new or fully-committed Christian? Write them in your journal.

HEAR THE WORD

Matthew 6:1, 9-15. “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

This, then, is how you should pray:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Discuss: What has been your experience of prayer? Let’s look at each line of this prayer:

- Jesus tells us to address God as “Father.” God wants to be as close to you as a loving parent! How do you feel about this type of intimacy with God? What is God like for you?
- The first request in this prayer asks for God’s kingdom to come so that his purposes are accomplished on earth as in heaven. He is making all things right through his justice, mercy, and compassion. In what ways do you hope for God to make things right in the world?
- This is a communal prayer, with “us” and “our” repeated for emphasis. What implications does this communal aspect have for your relationships?
- Why does the prayer specify *daily* bread? How does Jesus regard our needs?

WEEK 2-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD & OTHERS

- In making things right with God, we ask for his forgiveness and we forgive others. How is receiving and extending forgiveness an aspect of God's kingdom coming?
- As you grow spiritually, God will continue his healing and restoring work in you. Where are the places you are tempted? Ask God for his help and deliverance.



Pray:

- Be honest with your Father in heaven about what you need today.
- Ask him to show you areas of sin in your life. Confess these broken places and ask for forgiveness.
- If you are holding a grudge against a group or a person who has hurt you, ask God to show you how to forgive them.

► RESPOND ACTIVELY

Jesus wants his followers to be spiritually healthy. Just like people eat, sleep and exercise regularly to nurture their bodies, Christians have daily and weekly rhythms to nurture their faith.

Look at the spiritual exercises on the next page: *"Plan for Spiritual Growth."* Try some of these spiritual exercises for praying regularly, reading the Bible, serving others, and connecting in community with other Christians.

►► STRETCH GOAL

- Jesus talks a lot about forgiveness. Is there a tough conversation you need to have to reconcile with someone? Decide on a plan of action to restore the relationship.
- As you follow Jesus, it is important to get involved in a campus fellowship and a church. Invite a few non-Christian friends to go with you this week.

WEEK 2-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WORKSHEET

PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Please pick one spiritual growth exercise that you will do this week. Keep track of your experiences in your journal.

☐ PRAY DAILY

Here is a format you can use to guide your prayers. It is called ACTS:

ADORATION: appreciating God for who he is apart from what he gives us
"Thank you for being a forgiving a God."

CONFESSION: acknowledging to God our specific sin and asking forgiveness
"I confess that I have not loved you as I should this week."

THANKSGIVING: thanking God for all he has done for us
"Thank you for helping me with my stress during a busy week."

SUPPLICATION: asking God to supply our needs and the needs of others.
"Help me to spend time with you every day."

☐ READ THE BIBLE DAILY

Ask questions as you read. Here are some ideas:

- How does this story or these verses show me what God is like?
- What is the main message in this text? What does it mean for my life?
- What is my favorite verse from what I'm reading? Why?

Two suggestions for what to read:

- Read the short letter of 1 John, one chapter a day
- Join thirstyproject.org and receive a daily Bible passage with three reflection questions on your smart phone.

WEEK 2-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WORKSHEET

☐ **SERVE OR HELP SOMEONE**

Ask God to give you opportunities to serve or help others. Here are some suggestions:

- Ask someone how they are doing and take the time to *listen*.
- Put someone else's needs before your own.
- Act on something you learned from reading the Bible this week.
- Share with someone what God has done for you. Invite them to experience God too.

☐ **CONNECT WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS**

Talk with someone about Jesus every week; we can't grow alone. Here are some ideas:

- Attend a small group Bible study or campus fellowship gathering.
- Make an appointment for coffee with a friend or ministry staff worker.
- Go to church weekly to worship Jesus and listen to a good biblical message to help you grow.
- Have you been baptized? Baptism is a command from Jesus (see Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism helps us to publicly declare our faith in Jesus. Find out from your church what steps you need to take regarding baptism. If you will be getting baptized, invite your friends to come and witness your new commitment to Jesus!

WEEK 3-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

YOUR JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

Last week's study clarified that following Jesus not only affects your relationship with God, It also has an impact on your entire network of family, friends, and relationships with others, especially in a community of faith. Review your week with the questions below. Then learn more this week about the core mission of Jesus and the implications for your life.

DEBRIEF & INTERPRET

- How did you feel about fully committing your life to Jesus this week? What thoughts about following Jesus came to mind?
- What did you enjoy about your daily spiritual "exercise"? What was challenging? How did you experience God?
- Did you get a chance to try a stretch goal from last week? Which one? If not, what were some barriers?

HEAR THE WORD

Matthew 16:21-27. From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Then Jesus said to his disciples,

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."

Discuss:

- What surprises you about this story? What do you like about it?
- How does Jesus view his impending death? Why is Peter confused about the role of suffering in Jesus' life?
- What does Jesus say about suffering and what it means to follow him? What does he promise to those who choose him over gaining the world?

WEEK 3-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

YOUR JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

- How do you feel about following Jesus and denying yourself?
- For the rest of your life as a Jesus-follower, you are invited to deny yourself and take up your cross. What does this look like to you? What is good about this?



Pray: *Lord, please help me to understand what it means to follow you even if I might have to suffer. Show me how to take up your cross, deny myself, and follow you wherever you want me to go.*

► RESPOND ACTIVELY

“Taking up your cross” can be a difficult concept to grasp. We naturally crave immediate gratification and comfort. God’s call on your life includes yielding, serving, loving others, and even giving up your dreams to him. God will give you a new purpose. Your challenge this week is to take a small step towards taking up your cross by being generous in a costly way.

Money is something that has a hold on many people. Pick one of these ways to demonstrate generosity:

- Give your favorite shirt to a friend or charity.
- Give money to a charity you believe in.
- Treat someone to a meal and get to know each other better.

►► STRETCH GOAL

You can help your non-Christian friends take a look at the self-sacrificing love of Jesus for themselves.

- Start a Bible discussion with them and ask them to share what they think about Jesus.
- Over a meal, tell your friends how you are growing in your faith and invite them to grow with you.

WEEK 4-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

YOUR LIFELONG ADVENTURE

In last week's story, Jesus talked about some hard realities for his followers. Use the Debrief questions for reflection. This week, Jesus describes a variety of spiritual conditions in people, including those who are good soil for fruitful spiritual growth.

DEBRIEF & INTERPRET

- How do you feel about being a Jesus-follower right now? How has God been showing up for you?
- Last week you were encouraged to give away something costly. What did you learn about yourself? About God?

HEAR THE WORD

ww That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Discuss:

- What do the four soils described by Jesus have in common? How are they different?
- What is the relationship between Jesus' word (the seed) and fruitfulness?

WEEK 4-GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS YOUR LIFELONG ADVENTURE

- Each soil represents a response to Jesus and his teaching. What hinders fruitfulness in the first three soil types? Can you think of people who fit each category?
- What are some characteristics that result in someone being “good soil”?
- Which soil described you a few months ago? Today? What has changed?
- Jesus identifies the thorns as “worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.” What are common thorns that threaten to choke out spiritual vitality for you and your friends?



Pray: *Jesus, I want to be good soil and to bear fruit for your purposes in our world. I confess that I have let other things choke out your voice in my life. I am afraid of persecution; make me brave. I worry a lot; give me your peace. I like wealth; make me generous. I love my own pleasures and ambitions; help me take up my cross joyfully. Please help me turn to you more fully so that I can experience the fruitful life that you want me to live.*

► RESPOND ACTIVELY

Good soil requires attention and care so seeds can put down deep roots and grow up into healthy plants.

Do a soil check this week. What helps you to grow spiritually? What hinders your growth? What seems to be the strongest (and weakest) part of your growth in faith? Use the “Soil Analysis: Journaling Assignment” on the next page and write down your reflections and prayers. Share your reflections with one Christian and one non-Christian.

► STRETCH GOAL

- Mentor someone else. Being good soil involves sowing seeds of faith in others. We join with Jesus in sowing the great news about Jesus wherever we go so others might follow him too.

SOIL ANALYSIS: JOURNALING ASSIGNMENT

Healthy growth as a follower of Jesus (like healthy soil) happens in vibrant and dynamic ways over time. Please review the discipleship vision:

- You grow **in Christ** as you grow in intimacy and identity as a beloved child of God.
- You grow to be more **like Christ** as your passions, energies, and interests are transformed by his love.
- You grow **with Christ** as you join him in his mission to bring other people into his good kingdom of justice, mercy, and compassion.

Spend time reflecting on the following questions and journaling to assess your spiritual growth and health. Respond all at once or over several days.

1. FOR YOUR GROWTH IN CHRIST:

- What are your greatest assets relationally? How are they contributing to or inhibiting your growth as a disciple? Ask God for a next step in relationship with him or others.
- What are your greatest securities and insecurities in identity? Ask God to speak a word to you in prayer or Scripture about your growing identity in him.

2. FOR YOUR GROWTH LIKE CHRIST:

- What is your greatest character strength? Your greatest character flaw? In each area (strength and flaw), how is Jesus inviting you to become more like him? Consider asking this question in prayer with someone who knows you well.
- What are your greatest passions or interests? Spend a moment asking God what he wants to do in these areas.

3. FOR YOUR GROWTH WITH CHRIST:

- Reflect on your immediate world (friends, university, city, family) and ask Jesus how he is already at work in that world. Ask what part he wants you to play in that work.
- In what way (if any) have you been involved in Jesus' mission so far (his mission is very diverse!)? Ask God what next steps he has for you in mission.

Putting these reflections together, ask Jesus which of these dimensions of growth (In, Like, or With) he wants you to focus on in the next month. Revisit these questions periodically as a check-up for your spiritual growth.

[illegible]

GROW
IN CHRIST, LIKE CHRIST, & WITH CHRIST

NEXT STEPS

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

Congratulations on finishing this four-week series. We hope and expect that God is preparing you for continued growth with some exciting next steps.

Please look over these five areas for possible next steps and pick the growth area that God may be nudging you toward. Focus on this area.

CONNECT WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS.

- ☐ Join a weekly small group Bible study.
- ☐ Hang out with the small group members. Share meals together and build friendships.
- ☐ Get into their lives, and let them into your personal life. Introduce them to your family and your network of friends.

GROW AS A WITNESS TO JESUS.

- ☐ Make it a habit to share your story of faith with others.
- ☐ Find someone who is good at sharing their faith. Ask them how they learned to be winsome as they talk about faith. Ask for their feedback on your story. Try talking about your favorite stories of Jesus in the Gospels. And try again.
- ☐ Read a book about sharing your faith. (If you want to grow in apologetics, read *Faith is like Sky Diving* by Rick Mattson, IVP.)

MENTOR OTHERS.

- ☐ Now that you have been through the GROW series, find someone else you can lead through it. Meet with them weekly for four weeks.
- ☐ Start meeting with someone who is curious about Jesus. Be sure to keep your friendships with your non-Christian friends.
- ☐ Intentionally befriend people who need a friend. Consider joining a club or group in order to bless non-Christians. Pray for God to lead you in this.

START A SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY FOR YOUR SEEKER FRIENDS

- ☐ Ask your non-Christian friends if they would like to start a weekly small group Bible study with you.
- ☐ See if you can be an apprentice to someone who has been a small group leader for a year or two. Learn from them what it takes to be a small group leader.
- ☐ Offer to host the small group in your room or apartment. Invite a seasoned leader to help you lead it.

SERVE ON A SUMMER PROGRAM.

Short-term urban or global programs are great places to grow in faith. In fact, those who go and volunteer in these settings often feel that they receive much more than they give.

- ☐ Ask your staff worker or local pastor what summer mission programs have a good reputation and will offer you a strong team of peers you can join.
- ☐ Interview someone who had a good experience in a summer missions program in the past. Ask how they grew in their faith that summer.

Above all else, please keep falling in love with Jesus. Below are five Bible stories to strengthen your relationship with him as you continue on your spiritual journey of transformation.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH JESUS

Jesus is not only fully God, but he is fully human, God-with-us. What does God look like in human form? As we see Jesus love, challenge, and interact with people, we fall more deeply in love with him. Here are some amazing passages for further study that help us bond more deeply with Jesus.

JESUS IN ACTION

Matthew 14: 22-23. Jesus walks on water with Peter. Jesus invites us to join him in all of the mind-boggling things that he is doing.

Mark 5:21-43. Jesus meets a poor woman and a rich man at the same time. He honors the faith of the powerless and he has mercy on the powerful.

Luke 7:36-50. Jesus is anointed by a sinful woman. Jesus masterfully confronts the religious hypocrites while honoring the lowly.

John 2:1-12. Jesus turns water into wine. Jesus is the life of the party, demonstrating his over-the-top lavishness by saving the best for last.

John 21:1-25. Jesus restores Peter. Jesus pinpoints an area that needs healing in Peter's life and loves him enough to do the healing work.

JOURNALING

... is a popular way to record how God is working in your life. Use this page or a journal of your own to record your responses to week one.

WRITE:

[illegible]**ONLINE**

Find all of these Bible Studies, reflection questions and resources at:
<http://studentsoul.intervarsity.org/beginning-journey>

SKETCH, DOODLE, ETC. :

GROW: LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS

WRITE:

[illegible]

SKETCH, DOODLE, ETC. :

