



Small Group Guide: Built to Follow

Series: Church Maintenance

Overview

This week's message explored what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ -- not just a believer, but a lifelong follower. Discipleship is not easy, and Jesus never promised it would be. But with the right foundations in place, we can remain committed to following Christ through every season of life. This guide will help your group dig deeper into three essential qualities every disciple needs: a tender heart, thick skin, and a teachable spirit.

Key Takeaways

- Discipleship is a lifelong commitment, not a one-time decision. Jesus commanded his followers in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples as they themselves were going -- meaning we teach others what we are already learning.
- Jesus was upfront about the cost of following him. In John 16, he told his disciples they would face tribulation in this world, but that they could have peace in him.
- Discouragement is one of the greatest threats to a believer's walk with Christ. It is universal, recurring, contagious, and circumstantial -- and it must be addressed rather than ignored.
- Three qualities protect a disciple from being derailed by discouragement: a tender heart, thick skin, and a teachable spirit.
- It is okay to not be okay -- but it is not okay to stay that way.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Take a few minutes to check in with one another. On a scale of one to ten, how encouraged do you feel in your walk with Christ right now? You do not have to explain your answer unless you want to.

Section 1: The Cost of Discipleship

1. The sermon described how Jesus was honest with his disciples about the difficulty of following him. Have you ever felt like the full cost of following Jesus was not explained to you early in your faith? How did that affect you when hard times came?
2. The pastor said, "It is okay to not be okay, but it is not okay to stay that way." Do you feel like your church community -- including this small group -- is a safe place to admit when you are struggling? What would make it safer?
3. Can you think of a time when your obedience to God cost you something -- a relationship, a job opportunity, your comfort, or your reputation? What did you learn from that experience?

Section 2: Understanding Discouragement

1. The sermon identified four characteristics of discouragement: it is universal, recurring, contagious, and circumstantial. Which of these four surprised you most, and why?
2. The pastor shared that it is not always a moral failure that causes people to walk away from God -- sometimes it is simply discouragement left unchecked. Have you seen this happen in someone's life, or experienced it yourself? What helped, or what do you wish had been different?
3. Discouragement is described as contagious. Have you ever walked into a room and felt the atmosphere shift because of someone's discouragement -- or been the person who brought that discouragement into the room? How do we balance being honest about our struggles while also guarding against spreading discouragement to others?

Section 3: A Tender Heart

1. The sermon used the image of a callus -- helpful on hands, dangerous on the heart. What are some of the things in life that have the greatest potential to harden a person's heart toward God or toward others?
2. Read Ezekiel 36:26. God promises to replace a heart of stone with a heart of flesh. Have you ever experienced a moment where God softened something in you that had become hard? What did that process look like?
3. The pastor pointed to Jesus as the ultimate example of maintaining a tender heart even under extreme pain and betrayal. What is one relationship or

situation in your life right now where you sense your heart beginning to harden? What would it look like to bring that before God this week?

Section 4: Thick Skin

1. The sermon drew a distinction between a tender heart and thick skin -- having a tender heart means you still care, while having thick skin means you do not let every offense control you. In your own life, do you tend to struggle more with being too easily wounded, or with becoming too hardened toward people? How does that show up?
2. The pastor said, "If the enemy cannot get you to stop following Jesus through temptation, he will try to get you to stop following him through offense." Can you think of an example -- either in your own life or someone you know -- where offense became the thing that pulled someone away from God or from the church?
3. Hebrews 12:15 warns against allowing a root of bitterness to grow. What is the difference between processing hurt in a healthy way and allowing bitterness to take root? What practical steps help you tell the difference in your own life?

Section 5: A Teachable Spirit

1. The sermon stated, "The moment I decide I have nothing left to learn is the moment I quit being a disciple of Jesus." Is there any area of your faith -- a particular doctrine, a spiritual discipline, a relationship dynamic -- where you have stopped being curious or open to growth? What would it take to reopen that area?
2. The American Bible Society study cited in the sermon found that reading Scripture at least four times a week was connected to measurable decreases in bitterness, anger, discouragement, and loneliness, and measurable increases in generosity, faith-sharing, and discipling others. What is your current rhythm of engaging with Scripture, and what is one realistic adjustment you could make this week?
3. The pastor listed four practices for remaining teachable: commit to growth, practice humility, ask questions, and own your mistakes. Which of these four is the most difficult for you personally, and why?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Heart Check -- Spend time in prayer this week asking God the three diagnostic questions from the sermon: Has my heart become hardened? Do I have thick skin? Am I teachable? Write down what comes to mind and bring it back to share with the group.

Scripture Engagement -- Commit to reading or listening to Scripture at least four times this week. It does not have to be a lengthy session. Even ten to fifteen minutes counts. At your next meeting, share one thing God showed you.

Discouragement Inventory -- Identify one area of your life where discouragement has taken hold. Write it down, pray over it, and share it with at least one trusted person this week -- whether that is a group member, a friend, or your spouse.

Extend Compassion -- Think of one person in your life who has hurt or offended you. Rather than rehearsing the offense, pray for that person by name each day this week. Ask God to help you see them through his eyes.

Own a Mistake -- Is there a relationship where you owe someone an apology or an acknowledgment that you were wrong? Take a step toward that conversation this week.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by placing a hand over your heart and praying together. Use these three simple phrases as a guide:

- Lord, keep my heart tender.
- Lord, give me thick skin.
- Lord, keep me teachable.

Then spend a few minutes praying specifically for anyone in the group who shared a struggle, a discouragement, or a difficult relationship during the discussion.

Memory Verse for the Week

Proverbs 4:23 -- Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.