

LEADER GUIDE — FORMED BY THE GOSPEL

SESSION 1:2 | FOLLOW ME

Overview for Leaders

Jesus defines discipleship not as agreement with ideas, but as a reorientation of allegiance, identity, and direction. Following Jesus involves denying self-rule, embracing the cost of obedience, and walking behind Him into the life He alone provides. This guide is designed to help your group wrestle honestly with what they are following and who is shaping their lives. Jesus is inviting us into true life and He tells us plainly what that path looks like.

Big Idea

Following Jesus means a transfer of authority, from self-rule to Christ's rule, that reshapes how we live, what we value, and where our life is headed by "getting behind" Jesus.

Your Role as Leader

Create a space of trust and honesty. Guide the group through Jesus' words without softening them or weaponizing them. Keep discussion centered on direction, allegiance, and formation, not perfection or comparison. Invite reflection, not debate. Let conviction arise without shame, and encouragement without minimizing the cost of discipleship. You are facilitating formation, not managing outcomes.

Session Flow – *Adjust as Needed*

- Icebreaker — 5 min
- Scripture Reading & Context — 10 min
- Discussion (8–10 questions) — 40–45 min
- Application Challenge — 5 min
- Prayer & Reflection — 10 min
- Announcements — 2 min

Key Scriptures

- Mark 8:34–38
- Luke 23:26
- Hebrews 12:1–2
- John 12:24–25
- Matthew 6:19–21; 10:32–33

LEADER NOTES, GROUP QUESTIONS, & COMMENTARY

(Use these notes to frame discussion and connect themes)

Icebreaker (Choose One)

Purpose – Warm the room and surface honest reflection about influence and direction.

Suggested Options:

- When you hear the phrase “follow your heart,” what comes to mind?
- Growing up, who did you naturally imitate or want to be like?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Call to Follow — Read Mark 8:34

Question: *Jesus begins with a condition: “If anyone wants to follow after me...” What does that tell us about discipleship?*

Leader Insight: Jesus invites, not coerces — but He defines the terms clearly.

Cue: Emphasize choice and invitation, not pressure.

2. Deny Yourself — Read Mark 8:34; Luke 22:57–60

Question: *Jesus says to “deny yourself.” How is this different from self-improvement or self-denial as discipline?*

Leader Insight: This is a renouncing of self-rule, not self-worth. Authority is the issue.

Cue: Guard against shame-driven interpretations.

3. Transfer of Authority

Question: *Where do you see self-rule most clearly competing with Jesus’ authority in everyday life?*

Leader Insight: Discipleship always involves leadership — someone is setting direction.

Cue: Normalize struggle without excusing resistance.

4. Take Up Your Cross — Read Mark 8:34; Luke 23:26

Question: *Why would Jesus use the image of the cross, and how would His original audience have heard this?*

Leader Insight: The cross was not symbolic — it meant surrendering control over one's life.

Cue: Keep focus on obedience, not chasing suffering.

5. Behind Jesus

Question: *Luke says Simon carried the cross behind Jesus. Why does position matter in discipleship?*

Leader Insight: Disciples follow footsteps; they don't chart the route.

Cue: Highlight imitation over intention.

6. Losing Life to Find It — Read Mark 8:35; John 12:24–25

Question: *Why does Jesus say trying to save your life actually leads to losing it?*

Leader Insight: Control promises life but delivers anxiety and loss.

Cue: Invite reflection on control vs trust.

7. The Value of the Soul — Read Mark 8:36–37

Question: *What “gain” does Jesus contrast with the value of the soul?*

Leader Insight: Earthly gain always has an expiration date.

Cue: Avoid moralizing success; focus on ultimate value.

8. Allegiance Revealed — Read Mark 8:38; Matthew 10:32–33

Question: *Why does Jesus connect allegiance to Him with public identification?*

Leader Insight: Allegiance is revealed under pressure, not comfort.

Cue: Keep discussion inward, not accusatory.

9. Formation Over Time

Question: *How does the shoe / dust-of-the-rabbi illustration help clarify spiritual formation?*

Leader Insight: Formation happens through proximity and repetition.

Cue: Emphasize patience and direction.

APPLICATION (Leader Version)

Application Focus: Invite the group to reflect on *who or what they are functionally following*. Ask each person to identify one area where Jesus' authority needs to replace self-rule this week. Obedience does not earn life, but it flows from trusting the One who gives it.

Leader Prompt: “Where do you sense Jesus inviting you to get back behind Him instead of running ahead or resisting?” Encourage specificity, not generalities.

Application Examples:

- Control & Trust: Releasing anxiety-driven control over finances, schedule, or outcomes by intentionally praying before making decisions.
- Obedience: Saying yes to a clear command of Jesus you've been delaying (forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity, or honesty).
- Allegiance: Choosing faithfulness to Jesus over cultural pressure at work, online, or in relationships.
- Identity: Letting go of an identity rooted in success, approval, or comfort and embracing identity as a follower of Jesus.
- Direction: Adjusting how time is spent this week to reflect who you are following (media, habits, rhythms).

Group Prayer Time:

Pray around these themes:

- Surrender of self-rule
- Courage to follow Jesus openly
- Trust in Jesus as the giver of true life
- Gratitude for the life He secured through the cross

Close with: “Jesus, help us deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow You — trusting that Your way leads to true life. Amen.”

Leader Follow-Up

- Check in mid-week with one encouragement
- Affirm signs of obedience, not outcomes
- Remind the group: formation happens by walking, not rushing