

FEARLESS CONVERSATION™

WHY IS JESUS SO RADICAL?

DISCUSSIONS FROM
MATTHEW AND LUKE

LEADER GUIDE

CONTENTS

Lesson 1: Why did God come as a baby? (Luke 2:1-20)	9
Lesson 2: Can we really beat temptation? (Matthew 4:1-11)	17
Lesson 3: What does it really mean to follow Jesus? (Matthew 4:18-25)	25
Lesson 4: How can I tell if Jesus cares enough to act in my situation? (Matthew 9:18-26)	33
Lesson 5: What does it mean if Jesus really is God's Son? (Luke 9:18-36)	41
Lesson 6: Why did Jesus tell such confusing stories? (Matthew 13:24-45)	51
Lesson 7: Was Jesus racist, or sexist—or both? (Matthew 15:21-28)	61
Lesson 8: What's Jesus got against grown-ups? (Luke 18:15-17)	69
Lesson 9: What was really going on at Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem? (Luke 19:29-44)	77
Lesson 10: What if God wants more than I want to give? (Matthew 26:36-55)	87
Lesson 11: Did God really disown Jesus on the cross? (Matthew 27:32-55)	95
Lesson 12: Resurrection seems so impossible...how can I believe in a literal "Easter" story? (Matthew 27:62–28:15)	103
Lesson 13: How can I know Jesus is really alive today? (Luke 24:36-53)	111

LESSON 3: WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS?

LEADER PREP

- Read the entire lesson ahead of time. Also read the corresponding pages in the Why Is Jesus So Radical? Participant Guide as there may be additional material provided there that will be helpful to you.
- Make yourself familiar with the “Behind the Scenes” boxes scattered throughout this lesson. If someone has a question, it’s better to refer them to the guide than to provide the answer yourself. You’ll help your group become comfortable with researching their own questions about the Bible when they are studying alone.
- Have a ruler available for every two people. If you cannot locate enough rulers, you can use wooden dowel rods, unsharpened pencils, Tinker Toy stick pieces, and so on. Just make sure the objects are of a uniform length.
- Pray. Lots.

GREETING

BEHIND THE SCENES

When we meet Jesus in Matthew 4:18, he’s left Nazareth for Capernaum, and then he continues through Galilee. Verse 23 indicates he taught in synagogues and healed every sickness among the people. His ministry wasn’t reserved for those who had the most teaching. It wasn’t reserved for Jews. He reached beyond

the expectations of others as he connected with the Gentiles. People from many surrounding areas reached out to him, trusting him to teach and heal (verse 25). Jerusalem and Judea were Jewish regions, while Decapolis was primarily Gentiles, and Galilee was a region with a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Jesus attracted and ministered to them all. He walked among all classes of people. He healed every disease (verse 24). Jesus didn't meet people's expectations. He exceeded them.

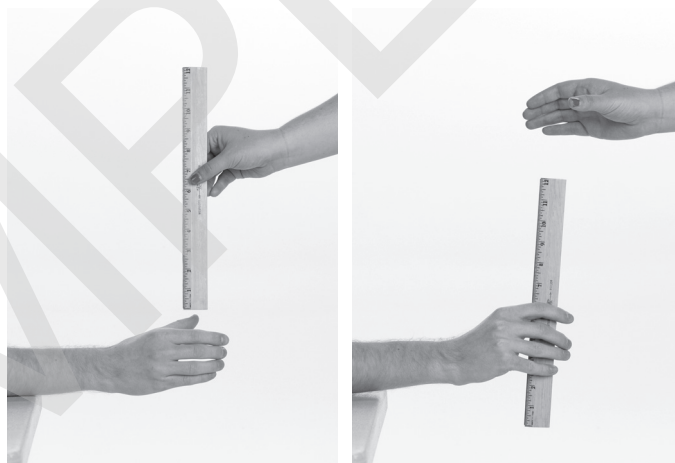
How does this challenge the social boundaries of life today?

- Welcome everyone and be sure to introduce yourself.
- Be sure everyone has a copy of the participant guide.
- Let everyone know you'll be moving through Lesson 3 today, so they can find that section in their participant guide and use it to prompt them through today's lesson.
- Explain that there are many "Behind the Scenes" commentary notes throughout the lesson. These can be read by participants as they come to that section of the lesson—or people who want to plan ahead can read them during the week to be ready for the next lesson.

Then ask:

How's your reaction time? We're going to find out! Pair up with someone and grab a ruler (or other

object you located beforehand, and adjust the instructions accordingly).



Here's how to test your reaction time. One person will sit or stand with his or her arm on a flat surface. Tables work great. The arm should be positioned so that the wrist extends just beyond the edge with the index finger and thumb positioned as if they're ready to clamp together and grab something—like a lobster claw. The other person will hold the ruler vertically above their partner's hand.

The end with zero on it should be just above your partner's finger and thumb, but make sure it's not touching. Without giving any other clues, such as eye contact, verbal warnings, and so on, the person with the ruler will drop it, and the partner should catch it as soon as possible. Write down the centimeter mark on the ruler where your finger and thumb clamp onto the ruler. (If you're using something other than a ruler, just have them write the approximate length of the place where they clasped the object—no need to be exact.)

There's space on page 23 in your participant guide to record your results. Repeat it three times, then switch so each person gets to test his or her reaction time. Make sure you introduce yourself to your partner, too.

Allow 5 minutes.

Get together with another pair, so you'll form a small group of four, introduce yourselves, and share what surprised—or didn't surprise—you about your reaction times. You'll have 4 minutes.

- **What surprised—or didn't surprise—you about your reaction time?**

Allow 4 minutes for people to get into small groups (they may need to move their chairs into smaller circles), introduce themselves, and discuss this question. Give them a 30 second "wrap-up" alert, and then continue.

Thanks for starting today with a challenge. We're going to continue the challenge as we grapple with questions about responding to people as we follow them. So, let's get started.

You'll find a question on page 23 of your participant guide. Discuss this with your small group for the next 5 minutes.

- **When you have the opportunity to lead, what do you expect of those who follow you?**

Allow 5 minutes for discussion. Give a 30-second wrap-up alert, then invite a few people to share their answer to the question with the larger group.

LEADER LEARNING

As a leader, you don't have to know (or share) all the answers. Learning is a process of the learner, and your role as a leader is to facilitate that process. Ask questions that guide the process. Invite people to explore. Give them space to process. Their questions and experiences won't match yours, but

God knows just where each of them—and you—are and where they need to go next. Trust God to reach a multitude of individuals with different needs even when they're all together in one room going through the same lesson.

GROUNDING

Let's get grounded in God's Word so we can understand more about what it means to follow Jesus. Today's Bible account is from Matthew 4:18-25. Jesus publicly

begins his ministry following his baptism and time of testing in the wilderness. He moves from Nazareth to Capernaum and begins preaching. He then meets the people who will become his first disciples and begins to heal the sick.

Let's read Matthew's account.

Read Matthew 4:18-25 aloud, or ask for a volunteer from your group to read it aloud. Encourage everyone else to follow along in their own Bibles or in their participant guides.

God's Word: Matthew 4:18-25

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ 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, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

²⁴ News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Before we discuss this, take a moment to personally reflect.

- **What are the first questions that come to mind about this passage? What sort of jumps out at you and catches your attention?**

Go ahead and capture those initial thoughts and questions in your participant guide.

Wait at least 1 minute—or even a little longer—so people can jot down their questions or thoughts before moving forward. This should be something that people do on their own—not in discussion groups. When it appears that everyone is ready to move on, continue.

GRAPPLING

We'll get to your personal questions and thoughts in a bit. Before we start into this time of discussion, I'd like to remind everyone that we want this to be a safe place to share our thoughts. This includes being respectful to each other and listening. Let's trust that God will guide the direction we take as we explore the Bible together.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Matthew 4:18-25 describes Jesus' calling of four men (Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John) into ministry with him. Jesus didn't wait to see who would come to him. He met them where they were. Jesus didn't go to the Temple and get the experts of the Law to follow him. Jesus knew he needed people who could minister to, relate to, and provide for people in practical ways. He wanted people who could fish, as these men could. He promised them he'd teach them a different kind of fishing, but he would build on what they already knew to develop them into the disciples he knew they could be.

Let's start by discussing in our small groups. You'll find two questions under the "Grappling" section in your participant guide. Start with just the first one. You'll talk about this for 5 minutes or so in your small group.

- **As you read this passage from Matthew, how would you describe the way the disciples followed Jesus?**

Allow 5 minutes for discussion, then ask for a few people to share their observations with the larger group before moving on to the next question.

Let's talk about the next question as a large group. As we grapple with this question, keep your experience with the ruler and your reaction times in mind.

- **When Jesus calls followers today, does he expect them to react by dropping everything immediately and following him on the spot? Explain your answer.**

Allow 5 to 8 minutes for large group sharing. Remember to model and encourage listening and respect for others as they share. Thank everyone for sharing.

Now that we've dug a little deeper, let's revisit some of the observations and question we jotted down on our own. Maybe you have some new ones that came up during our discussion as well. Take about 10 minutes with your groups to share anything that seemed especially relevant, bewildering, or noteworthy to you as we read from Matthew 4. We'll help each other explore and grow.

Allow at least 10 minutes for groups to talk. Give a 1-minute alert so groups have time to finish their thoughts.

I'd like to get a taste of what you talked about, and I'm sure others would too! Does any group want to share an insight that your group found interesting?

Allow a few minutes for different groups to share. Depending on

how much time you have left, you can simply let groups report their insights and questions, or if you have time you can invite the larger group to respond to an insight or question that was shared. Keep in mind some questions will go unanswered, and that's okay. God will continue to work in people even after they leave today's lesson.

LEADER LEARNING

Bringing the large group together for brief sharing after small group discussions helps participants glean ideas and insights from those outside their small group. While it's necessary to keep most discussions within a small group experience—for time constraints, trust, and relationships—bringing the large group back together for a “taste test” of responses provides variety and enthusiasm.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This wasn't the first experience Andrew and Simon Peter had with Jesus. Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples who encountered Jesus as John identified him as the Lamb of God (John 1:35-40). The first thing Andrew did was tell his brother, Simon Peter, and take him to Jesus, where Simon Peter had his first interaction with Jesus (John 1:41-42).

There are two primary words translated into “know” in our English Bibles. One (*ginōskō*) indicates an insight, awareness, and understanding. It's what God gives us. We

might not be aware of every bit of knowledge he's given us, but it's something we don't have to actively learn or experience. He gifts it to us, and it's as if we know it by intuition. The other kind of knowing (*nous*) is what we acquire by learning. We have to experience it somehow—through hearing, reading, doing, and so on—in order to gain the knowledge. Just because we know *about* Jesus doesn't mean we *know* Jesus.

How do you know him?

After Jesus called his disciples and they responded immediately by following him, Jesus proceeded to continue ministering to people throughout Galilee, teaching, proclaiming, and healing.

•What does the variety of Jesus' actions and interactions in Matthew 4:18-25 tell you about his ministry—and what it might look like for you to follow Jesus?

Invite people to share their thoughts with the rest of the group. Be sure to thank people for being fearless in their conversation.

GROWING

It's great to have these conversations and really dig into what the Bible says. This helps us

move into greater understanding of God and grow in our relationship with God. One way we see that growth is through applying what we've discovered to our lives. God intends us to learn from what we read; he teaches us about himself, and he teaches us about ourselves.

BEHIND THE SCENES

When Jesus commanded Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him, it wasn't a passive invitation. They left what they knew to follow who they wanted to know. Jesus wouldn't just teach them what he knew; he taught them who he was. Following him involved more than accompanying him; it required sacrifice and commitment. It required setting themselves aside and emulating Jesus.

"Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it'" (Luke 9:23-24).

BEHIND THE SCENES

Matthew tells us that the first disciples immediately followed Jesus when he called them. But that immediate response to Jesus' calling didn't mean that they followed him without questions or problems. Far from it. In fact, the Gospels indicate that the disciples wrestled with their commitment, even after Jesus' resurrection from death. Even at the end of Matthew, the 11 remaining disciples

went to the mountain where Jesus told them to meet him. When they got there, “they worshipped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). Nonetheless, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

How has a mixture of belief and doubt marked your own discipleship?

Let’s revisit our reaction time experience and try it again. But this time we’ll add a new element. The person who is dropping the ruler will give their partner a clue about when he or she will drop the ruler. The person dropping the ruler decides what it will be. It might be a simple sound, such as a snap or phrase, or it might be a 3-2-1 countdown. It’s up to the person dropping the ruler to decide. Let your partner know what it is and try it a couple times, recording reaction times. Then switch places, again letting the person dropping the ruler decide what the clue will be. Once you’ve recorded two reaction times for each person, rejoin your small group of four and briefly share your experience.

- **How has your reaction time changed, and why?**

Allow about 5 minutes, giving a 1-minute alert. Then continue.

Following Jesus requires knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus includes taking time for a relationship with him and looking to him for leadership. As the disciples model for us, following requires a response. Consider your reaction time to God.

- **How would you describe your reaction time to God? What influences how quickly you respond to God?**

Invite everyone to write their reflections in the space provided in their participant guides. Let them know there is one more question for them there as well—they should go ahead and read and reflect on that one too.

Allow time for people to adequately reflect and journal, then close with a prayer, thanking God that we can approach him and each other without fear and trust him to provide and guide through everyday life.